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Abstract

Gao Xingjian, the Nobel laureate in literature in 2000, announced "Cold Literature" to be the core of his literary mind and practice. This thesis examines how the writer accomplishes such a literary cannon in his fictional writings.

There are three conceptual and practical inquiries in the thesis research: Cognitively, Gao's notion of Cold Literature indicates a switch of textual construction from the Aristotelian model about plot, characterization and overall structure, to an exclusively concentrated mimesis of the inner being. Ideologically, through the Brechtian alienation-effect, Cold Literature builds a group of binary opposites, such as female/male, nature/society, religion/secularity, nether world/this world, etc., and re-evaluates the broader cultural codes underlying the textual binaries. Rhetorically, Gao's fictional narrative foregrounds a series of figures of rhetoric, such as pronouns as protagonists, stream-of-language, fantasies, merging of genres, etc., to defamiliarize/estrange the conventional literary norms as well as a seemingly intimate world by disrupting the acts of perception and recognition.

The thesis comes to the conclusion that, as the canon of Gao's literary practice, Cold Literature connotes a writer's ontological perceptions of the reality of literary creation, literary representation, and fictional narrative.

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Table of Contents

Dedication

Abstract

Acknowledgement

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

About Gao Xingjian 1

A Personal Approach to Gao Xingjian 3

Scope of Inquiry 4

Objectives of Inquiry 5

Assumptions and Methodology 7

Chapter One An Overview of Critical Literature on Gao Xingjian's Fictional Writing 9

Universal Literature 10

Meta-fiction 12

Nature-oriented Literature 12

Root-seeking Literature 13

Recluse Literature 14

Carnivalesque Literature 15

Literature of the Absurd 16

The Individual and the Collective 16

Exploring the inner-Being of a Detached Self 18

"Re-visioning" of the World 19

Language 20

Chapter Two Cold Literature, Gao's Poetics of Writing 22

1. The Rudiment of Cold Literature: Gao's Views on Fiction 22

2. Cold Literature, and a Set of Key Relations 24
3. Fugitive: A Peripheral Position of Cold Literature 25
4. No Isms: the Transcendental Aesthetics of Cold Literature 27

Chapter Three Inner Subjectivities: the Impulsive Mechanism of the Self 30
Is Harmony Plausible? 30
1. Death 31
2. Desire 35
3. Fear 39
4. Loneliness 42
5. Purgatory 45
6. Identity Puzzles 50
7. The Imperceptible 54

Chapter Four Alienated Binaries: the Mirror-stage of Self Recognition 60
Which Is Fragmented, Self or Mirror? 60
1. The Female 61
2. Nature 64
3. Religion 69
4. Nether World 73
5. Cultural Otherness 77
6. Spiritual Otherness 82
7. The Uncanny 87

Chapter Five The Foregrounding of Poetic Devices 91
To Artificialize the Natural 91
1. Parallel Structure 92
2. Pronouns as Protagonists 94
3. Stream-of-Language 99

4. Magical Realism 104
5. Fantasy Narrative 108
6. Merging of Genres 112

Conclusion 117

1. *Taowang* (逃亡, fleeing), the Ontology of Literary Creation 118
2. *Jingguan* (靜觀, Distanced Gaze), the Ontology of Literary Representation 120
3. No Isms: the Ontology of Fictional Narrative 122
   (1) Cognitive Approach 124
   (2) Ideological Approach 125
   (3) Rhetorical Approach 126

Cited Works in Chinese 127
Cited Works in English 131
Glossary 136
Appendix A: Abstracts of Gao Xingjian's Two Novels 139
Appendix B: An Abstracted Chronology of Gao Xingjian 140

Introduction

About Gao Xingjian

Gao Xingjian (高行健, 1940-) was born in the inland province of Jiangxi when the anti-Japanese war in China was at its height. He came to maturity during the *fan youpai yundong* (反右派運動, anti-Rightist Campaign) (1957) and the Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) launched by the new communist regime that had been in power in mainland China since 1949.

Gao started to reflect on the nature of fictional narrative in the early 1980s. His treatise *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (現代小說技巧初探, A Preliminary Exploration of Modern Fictional Technique) in 1982 was the outcome of his critical thinking on the issue. With his groundbreaking insights on fictional creation, Gao was among the first literary theorists in the post-Mao era to introduce the idea of Modernist Fiction to Chinese literature. As a practical commitment to his theoretical exploration, most of his short stories were composed during the first half of the decade.

In 1983, due to the launch of *qingchu jingshen wuran yundong* (清除精神污染運動, Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign), Gao's play *Chezhan* (車站, Bus Stop) was banned from the stage, and the playwright was prohibited from publishing his writings.[1] To show his resistance to the authoritative restrictions, Gao undertook a long-distance journey to southern China travelling across different areas along the *Yangtze* River. This experience of wandering would become the subject matter of his masterwork, *Lingshan* (靈山, Soul Mountain). Gao's self-imposed exile echoes a particular literary tradition in the history of Chinese literature. When the literati writers were suffering from political suppression, such as Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BC) and Li Bo (李白, 701-762), they went on a self-imposed exile as a gesture of resistance against the authority.

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[1] Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian chuangzuo nianbiao 高行健創作年表 (A Chronicle of Gao Xingjian's Creative Activities)," in Gao Xingjian Lun 高行健論 (On Gao Xingjian), (Taipei: Linking Books 聯經出版社, 2004), 326.

A series of sufferings from the political suppression on his literary practice might finally lead to Gao's departure from the country. Through the first half of the 1980s, Gao had been criticized by the authorities for his fictional theories and theatrical experiments. At the invitation from the government of the West Germany, in 1987 Gao visited Germany and later moved to France working as a professional writer. When the Tiananmen Square Incident took place in 1989, Gao revoked membership of the Chinese Communist Party and sought residence in France as a political exile.[2] In 1991 he was publicly criticized by the authorities in mainland China as one of the "*taowang jingying* (逃亡精英, escaping elite)," and his properties in Beijing were confiscated. In the same year he made it known publicly that he would not return to China in his lifetime unless the totalitarian dominance in the country comes to an end.[3] The late 1980s and 1990s seem to have been Gao's most prolific period in terms of theatrical creation, fictional writing, creative painting as well as literary and artistic criticism. Gao's novel *Soul Mountain* was published in 1989, and his second novel *Yigeren de shengjing* (一個人的聖經, One Man's Bible) in 1997. *Soul Mountain* was first translated into Swedish as early as in 1992 by Göran Malmqvist (馬悅然), and eight years later, Mabel Lee's English translation of *Soul Mountain* was published. It has been observed that Gao's plays and paintings seem more popular in the West than his fictional writings.

In October 12th 2000, the Swedish Academy announced that the Nobel Prize in Literature for that year would be awarded to Gao Xingjian, "for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama."[4] A janitor of the apartment building where Gao lived told the press that he never expected such a quiet lonely Chinese guy to be a Nobel laureate. It was the Nobel Prize that stimulated a great increase in interest in Gao's writings among readers living outside mainland China.

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[2] Liu Zaifu, "Shanhaijing zhuan xu 山海經傳序 (A Preface to the Story of the Classic of Mountains and Seas)," in Gao Xingjian Lun 高行健論 (On Gao Xingjian), (Taipei: Linking Books, 2004), 84.

[3] Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian chuangzuo nianbiao 高行健創作年表 (A Chronicle of Gao Xingjian's Creative Activities)," 333.

[4] Horace Engdahl, "The Nobel Prize for Literature 2000: Gao Xingjian," The Ultimate Source for Nobel Prize Information, 12 October 2000, <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2000/press.html> (28 February 2007).

A Personal Approach to Gao Xingjian

It was from a literature professor that I first became familiar with the name of Gao Xingjian as a playwright when I was a college student in China. Due to the professor's mysterious yet affirmative attitude about the writer, it was out of curiosity, that I read two of Gao's plays, *Juedui xinhao* (絕對信號, Alarm Signal) (1982) and *Chezhan* (車站, Bus Stop) (1983), which were in the university library. Compared to such mainstream modern Chinese plays as *Leiyu* (雷雨, Thunderstorm) (1933) and *Chaguan* (茶館, Teahouse) (1957) that were, among others, held in esteem as the quintessential works in literary education, the thematic connotation and theatrical style of Gao's plays seemed too obscure for such an inexperienced literature student as I to understand.

The second time I heard about Gao Xingjian was in October 2000, when I learned from the internet that Gao would be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature that year. In that morning I very excitedly shared the news with the class I was teaching in a high school. Although the students had no knowledge of Gao Xingjian and his literary writings, they did feel inspired with enthusiasm by the acknowledged accomplishment of Chinese literature by the world beyond China. However, a few days later, all the information about Gao Xingjian being awarded the Nobel Prize was removed from the websites in mainland China. Even today it is impossible for people in the country to access even the slightest reference to the award information on the internet. The paperbacks of Gao's two novels I was able to read at a later time were pirated copies that a friend bought from a street vendor in the seaside city of Shenzhen. My experience of reading the novels was a difficult one, as it apparently is for many readers just as Liu Zaifu has observed.[5]

My third encounter with Gao Xingjian lasted a year and a half, the outcome of which is this thesis research that is focused on Gao's fictional writing under the

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[5] Liu Zaifu, "Yuedu 'Lingshan' yu 'Yigeren de shengjing' 閱讀《靈山》与《一個人的聖經》(Reading Soul Mountain and One Man's Bible)," in Gao Xingjian Lun, (Taipei: Linking Books, 2004), 121.

prerequisite notion of "*lengde wenxue* (冷的文學, cold literature)." The verbal composition of the term "Cold Literature" coined by Gao reminded me of *Lisao* (離騷, Lyrics of Departure),[6] since both of them connote a depressed sense of departure. In the process of reading Gao's fictional works, I was impressed by the dismal images and feelings deeply embedded in his narrative mannerism. Full of inquiries about the human soul, obsessions with heaven and the nether world, and intoxicated with natural beings, Gao's writings are clearly overwhelmed by spiritual sublimation/transcendence reinforced by the wandering in reality. I cannot help agreeing that his literary representation somehow continues the "ancient and therefore fainter tradition of the *Songs of the South* (Chu ci, [楚辭])."[7]

Scope of Inquiry

In my opinion, the notion of "Cold Literature" serves as the core of Gao's literary mind and practice. Gao wrote of this idea for the first time in his article *Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue* (我主張一種冷的文學, I Advocate A Kind of Cold Literature) that was published in *Zhongshi wanbao* (中時晚報, China Times Express) in Taiwan in 1990. Ever since then, from time to time Gao has spoken of the notion in other articles or situations. In 2005, a Chinese-English bilingual anthology of Gao's literary works titled *Cold Literature* was issued by the Chinese University Press of Hong Kong. However, few literary critics have engaged in a theoretical or practical inquiry about such a notion that features prominently in Gao's literary writing. While tracing the conceptual elements of "alienated-effect," seclusion and scepticism in Gao's literary advocacy, critics such as Torbjörn Lodén, Liu Zaifu, Mabel Lee and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin have spoken of the features of

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[6] There have been debates on the textual indication of the word *sao* (騷), as for whether it was an expression for "complains" or a kind of literary genre referring to the lyrics of *Chu* (楚). For earlier interpretations over the issue, see Wang Yi 王逸, and Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, Chuci buzhu 楚辭補注 (A Supplemental Annotation of the Songs of the South), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2002), 2. Also see Liu Xie 劉勰 and Fan Wenlan 范文瀾, Wenxin diaolong zhu 文心雕龍注 (Annotations to Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon), (HK: Shangwu yinshu guan 商務印書館, 1986), 48.

[7] Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Gao Xingjian in the 'Chinese' Perspective of Qu Yuan and Shen Congwen," Modern Chinese Literature and Culture 14, no. 2 (2002): 131.

"alienation/transcendence" in Gao's fictional narrative. Nevertheless, few of them consciously connect the literary mechanism of alienation with the notion of Cold Literature that Gao has embraced as his literary cannon to clarify for himself the aesthetic pursuits of his literary creation.

Among the critical materials I searched on Gao's literary writings, a considerable number of them focus on Gao's plays. Among those devoted to the study of Gao's fictional writings, almost all of them concentrate on his novels, especially on the novel *Soul Mountain*. Motivated by such a fact, I expanded my primary object of research to both of Gao's novels, originally focusing on *Soul Mountain*, and finally, including his 16 short stories to enrich my analysis. Although these short stories, except *Shunjian* (瞬間, Instant) published in 1991, belong to Gao's early writings, they did bear some burgeoning narrative qualities featured in Gao's novels. Most of all, they are a brilliant outcome of Gao's practice of Modernist fiction, supposedly providing the writer with the practical enlightenment that has led to his later literary commitment to Cold Literature.

There is a close intertextual relationship between Gao's plays and fictions. As Kwok-kan Tam indicates in his study, Gao's fictional writing is influenced by his theatrical experiments.[8] My research, nevertheless, has not included Gao's theatrical thoughts and works, except for the Brechtian "alienation-effect" that plays a profound role in his fictional writing. Neither has Gao's practice and commentaries on fine arts been a part of my research due to my unease about engaging in a comparative study of the difference between artistic forms and agencies. Instead, the research I have engaged in has been conducted strictly within the scope of narrative study, with a basic inquiry of how Cold Literature is fulfilled by specific narrative components, processes and concerns.

Objectives of Inquiry

With his advocacy of Cold Literature, Gao intends to engage in a detached

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[8] Kwok-kan Tam, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and the Politics of Recognition," in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001), 8.

representation of the self as well as the world. As an analogy, imagine the common psychological experience that an intellectually mature teenager who comes to realize that he is not the center of the world may develop. It appears as a detached perspective on himself, perceiving that he is an estranged character living within an irrelevant plot. Gao, as a writer, is conscious of this. He literalizes this particular psychological experience that lasts throughout one's adult life. In doing so, the writer gains a more accurate perception of the selfhood as well as the outer world that keeps mediating one's being.

There are three central terms accompanying the concept of Cold Literature: *taowang* (逃亡, fleeing), *jingguan* (靜觀, distanced gaze) and *meiyou zhuyi* (沒有主義, no isms). In Gao's mind, literature produced by a freewill is destined to exile itself.[9] In other words, serious literary creation is an eternal escape of the spirit from the shackles of varying ideology-oriented human identities to a free soul. With the ideological shackles thwarted in human spirits, the exile of literature would never end. If there is any specific temperament concerning the writer's perspective that differs from the literary tradition in the West, as Gao admits, it must be the attitude of *jingguan* (distanced gaze), which is developed from its Chinese experience urging his fictional writing to perform an alienated perception/contemplation on both the inner self and the outer world.[10] Repelling any artificial views of value crowned with various isms in modern artistic creation, Gao embraces the principle of *no isms* to entrench a writer's pure creativity when facing his spiritual product.[11]

Gao's fictional writings throughout the last two decades of the 20th century illuminate the social and intellectual context that produced his works as well as the timeless concerns about the limits of literary perception and representation. If art is fundamentally defined by its perceptual detachment from the world, how does Gao's literary art further the separation into a detached perception about the Self that is

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[9] Gao Xingjian, "Wenxue de liyou 文學的理由 (The Case for Literature)," in Wenxue de liyou 文學的理由 (The Case for Literature), (HK: Mingbao chubanshe 明報出版社, 2001), 29.
[10] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi 沒有主義 (No Isms)," in Meiyou zhuyi, (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 2000), 16.
[11] Ibid., 8.

claimed by his notion of Cold Literature?[12] When the Self as an equivalent of the outer world comes within the scope of literary representation, is literature inclined to decline the conveyance of the world? Or can the two cognitive categories still be bridged by a profound literary design so that literature would not fall into the blind alley of purely escapist literature? In order to pursue the unconventional idea of Cold Literature, what practical skills does Gao develop in his fictional narrative so that such principles as alienated perception/contemplation and *no isms* would not indulge in idle talk? Besides "the artistic sense" that normally occupies the main concern of pioneering experimentalists such as Gao,[13] does the practice of Cold Literature bear "the moral sense"[14] that contributes to the ethical connotation of literary creation and representation? Such questions form a basic thread of inquiry that runs through this thesis.

Assumptions and Methodology

This research is basically conducted as a narratological approach to Gao's fictional narrative. I have utilized narrative theory/narratology, which is rooted in the Western critical experience, to perform theoretical inquiries in the research. The reason it does not employ a Chinese narrative perspective (even though a consistent analysis of the Chinese impact on Gao's narrative elements is implemented in this research) lies in a lack of an applicable theoretical frame concerning fictional narrative in Chinese literary criticism. There has been a silent academic response over the last three decades to Andrew H. Plaks' call for "towards a critical theory of Chinese narrative."[15] In his newly released publication of *Chinese Theories of Fiction*, Mingdong Gu states that "there has been so far no systematic study of Chinese fiction theory that conceptualizes Chinese fiction and treats it on its own

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[12] Gao, "Bali suibi 巴黎隨筆 (Paris Jottings)," in Meiyou zhuyi 沒有主義 (No Isms), 3rd ed. (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地圖書有限公司, 2000), 23.
[13] Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian he tade jingshen zhi lu 高行健和他的精神之路 (Gao Xingjian and His Spiritual Trip)," in Gao Xingjian Lun, (Taipei: Linking Books, 2004), 4.
[14] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Narrative/Theory, ed. David H. Richter, (New York: Longman, 1996), 55.
[15] Andrew H. Plaks, "Towards A Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," in Chinese Narrative, ed. Andrew H. Plaks, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 309.

terms."[16] Although Gu's statement shows a lack of awareness of Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu's study on Chinese poetics of fiction more than a decade ago,[17] and Yang Yi (楊義)'s ambitious work on Chinese narratology,[18] his judgment about the general neglect of the Chinese narrative theory, both in China and the West, is reasonable. Moreover, strictly speaking, the inquiries of Gu, Lu and Yang, especially as Gu admitted,[19] are not grounded in traditional theoretical data as the titles of their treatises indicate, but ontological re-theorizing of Chinese fictional narrative.

Therefore, in the process of interpreting Gao's fictional narrative through Cold Literature, an approach/methodology of narrative inquiry in the Western context, as the classification of the interpretive entries indicate in the thesis, is taken as an absorbing mechanism of literary critique. In doing so, this research treats narrative in various dimensions of cognitive pattern, ideological instrument and rhetoric, as typified by the development of narrative theory ever since the breakdown of the New Critical orthodoxy in the 1960s.[20] Based on such a practical concern for the theoretical application, my research attempts to fulfill a narratological assumption about the object, and in the end reaches its findings in three aspects. Structurally and cognitively, Gao's notion of Cold Literature indicates a switch of textual construction from the Aristotelian model of plot, characterization and overall structure, to an exclusively concentrated mimesis of the inner being. Ideologically, through the Brechtian alienation-effect, it builds a group of binary opposites, such as female/male, nature/society, religion/secularity, nether world/this world, etc., and re-evaluates the broader cultural codes underlying the textual binaries. Rhetorically, it adopts a series of figures of rhetoric, such as pronouns as protagonists, stream-of-language, fantasies, merging of genres, etc., to defamiliarize/estrange the conventional literary norms as well as the seemingly

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[16] Mingdong Gu, Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 9.
[17] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, From Historicity to Fictionality, the Chinese Poetics of Narrative, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
[18] Yang Yi 楊義, Zhongguo xushi xue (中國敘事學, Chinese Narratology), (Taipei: Nanhua guanli xueyuan 南華管理學院, 1998).
[19] Gu, 14.
[20] Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 284-301.

Chapter One

An Overview of Critical Literature on Gao Xingjian's Fictional Writing

It has always been impossible for writers and literary theorists to furnish literature with an accurate definition as well as to set the rules regarding literary creation. As a professional writer who is dedicated to dealing with the delicate nature of literature, Gao Xingjian seems to reject any fruitless endeavour made by theorists, who have attempted to peel back the layers within literary works in order to achieve the supposed core using updated theoretical tools. He still holds a sincere mind on such literary issues as language and form, although he performs artistic experiments onto his works of drama, fiction and painting in an avant-garde style. Language would disappear during his writing process if he really became caught up in creative passion.[1] On the other hand, he has always tried to consciously extend the representative capability of language by re-discovering its primitive qualities that have always been ignored and even tortured by the literary currents.[2]

What kind of subject matters literature should deal with and what kind of form or style literature should follow to convey them seems a puzzling labyrinth, in the context of which literary analysis and interpretation can do little but keep its antennae as closely tuned as possible to the invisible truth while harbouring no ambition of reaching it. Gao admits clearly that he does not possess the ambition, but he does envisage tracing the untraceable in human beings as the principle of his literary creation.[3]

What kind of interpretation to make of literature has also been a question that has driven generations of theorists to pursue it. The facets of literature are so nebulous that there is no concrete explanation of literature that could satisfy people's experiences as well as their endless imagination. When Hamlet murmurs to himself "to be or not to be/that is the question," an everlasting interpretative paradox

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[1] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo 论文学写作 (On Literary Creation)," In Meiyou zhuyi 没有主义 (No Isms), 3rd ed. (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地图书有限公司, 2000), 41.

[2] Gao, "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxue xiezuo 现代汉语与文学写作 (Modern Chinese and Literary Creation)," In Wenxue de liyou 文学的理由 (The Reason of Literature), (HK: Mingbao chubanshe 明报出版社, 2001), 5.

[3] Gao, "Bali suibi 巴黎随笔 (Paris Jottings)," in Meiyou zhuyi, (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 2000), 23.

confronting human existence is unwittingly revealed. It is "to be" that became Gao's supreme pursuit within literature, during which writing can be an action to resist "not to be" that signifies the weakness of human beings in the face of earthly suppression from ideological authorities, social deterioration, and most of all, death and insanity.[4]

It has to be admitted that the various critical comments referenced below, which have been made by literary critics concerning Gao's fictional writing, are to some extent for the convenience of displaying a few ideas, and do not have to be labelled as the "labelling" done to Gao's works. Without being considered easy interpretations of literature, they are just multiple perspectives on the fictional art of a single writer in the context of an era of theoretical plurality.

Universal Literature

As the first Nobel Laureate by his literary creation in Chinese, Gao truly brings Chinese literature into the scope of world literature at a new level. Torbjörn Lodén points out that the novel *Soul Mountain* is one piece of "world literature with Chinese characteristics," since Gao's mingling of the cultural features from both China and the West is highly original and helps make the novel into an international one.[5] This conclusion evolved from Lodén's analysis of six aspects of the novel: 1) Gao refrains from Western influence on Chinese language and goes back to the traditional characters of Chinese. Yet, Lodén also admits that Gao's language still appears to be quite modern. 2) The subject of "alienation" turns out to be a major route Gao follows to explore human existence. 3) An atmosphere of primitivism in the novel reveals Gao's partiality to spontaneous human nature. 4) The basic tone of the novel is anti-Confucian. 5) A sceptical attitude toward the world signifies Gao's gesture of turning against orthodoxy. 6) Gao tries to manipulate Chinese and Western myths in his writing. But as Lodén observes as one example, the Western fantasy of "a prince on a white horse" just seems too weak to support his idea about Gao's manipulation of

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[4] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo," 43.
[5] Torbjö Lodén, "World Literature with Chinese Characteristics: On a Novel by Gao Xingjian," in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001), 273.

Western myths.[6]

Sylvia Li-Chun Lin also suggests that "the universal appeal" within Gao's works makes him one world-class writer, whose literary creation is of a universal scope that is far beyond national or ethnic pursuits. This universal appeal in Gao's writing, indicates Lin, is about the "fundamental issues of human existence" that transcend national and cultural borders. And one of the typical issues Lin focuses on is the everlasting contradiction between the individual and the collective will, as examined in Gao's writings.[7]

Mabel Lee attempts to re-contextualize "the self/other paradigm (Asia vs. West)," which is originally applied to legitimate the conservation of the self with the other, a culturally autonomous heterodoxy.[8] Only when this "one-way application" of the self/other paradigm is adjusted to an open condition, on which the cultural heterodoxy is conversely based to create a reflective attitude over the self's own culture, can a universal nature of literature be achieved.[9] The oriental philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism as the "other" cultural elements, Lee suggests, had been brought into academic thought in Europe during the nineteenth century so that the Western philosophical system has been reformulated with its universal traits as the outcome.[10] With this re-contextualized self/other paradigm in its literary sense, Gao Xingjian brings to his writing a universal/global quality by practicing a free interchange between different cultural and literary traditions.

Focusing on "universal validity," a quotation from the prize announcement, Kwok-kan Tam also speaks of the trans-cultural qualities beyond national boundaries as well as the aesthetic synthesis of Chinese heritage with Western styles within Gao's literary creation. For Tam, the universality of Gao's writings rests on the literary transition from the East to the West, as well as on transition to modernity. Tam especially attributes the credit of "universal validity" to Gao's personal artistic achievements, not to the national literature as a collective form of contemporary

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[6] Lodén, 268-72.
[7] Sylvia Li-Chun Lin, "Between the Individual and the Collective: Gao Xingjian's Fiction," World Literature Today 75, no. 1 (2001): 14.
[8] Mabel Lee, "Gao Xingjian on the Issue of Literary Creation for the Modern Writer," In Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001): 21-41.
[9] Ibid., 22.
[10] Ibid., 23.

Chinese writings.[11]

Meta-fiction

The literary device of a frequent switch of pronouns, along with an ensuing rapid shift in points of view, keeps attracting the attention of scholars to work on Gao's literary creation. Based on their reading of Gao's plays, Terry Siu-han Yip and Kwok-kan Tam reach the conclusion that the generous use of pronouns in Gao's plays, as well as in his fictions, leads to the gender exchangeability that is supposed to deconstruct sex/gender consciousness. Behind the process of deconstruction lies "the original self, which is asexual in its primordial mode of existence."[12] In disputing with Yip and Tam, Gang Gary Xu argues that the representational instability, which is not limited to the use of pronouns, is "more closely associated with unconscious desires than with any definitive truth or stable essences."[13] The major difference between Xu and Yip/Tam lies in whether the original self in Gao's writing is a "presymbolic" and "prelinguistic" construction. Xu draws on the self-reflexivity and nonreferentiality of "meta-fiction" to prove that Gao's literary experiments of representational instability weaving among the self, the other and trauma precisely "deconstruct the notion of an asexual prelinguistic nature," as well as typifing an interior structural sequence of self-reflection→fragmentation→representation of unconscious desires.[14]

Nature-oriented Literature

The primeval forests located in south-western China happen to be one of the main attractions in the novel *Soul Mountain*, which prompts the protagonist of "I" to carry out an exploration into nature. An interpretative attempt based on issues about

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[11] Kwok-kan Tam, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and the Politics of Recognition," in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001), 2.
[12] Terry Siu-han Yip and Kwok-kan Tam, "Gender and Self in Gao Xingjian's Three Post-Exile Plays," in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001), 217.
[13] Gang Gary Xu, "My Writing, Your Pain, and Her Trauma: Pronouns and (Gendered) Subjectivity in Gao Xingjian's Soul Mountain and One Man's Bible," Modern Chinese Literature and Culture 14, no. 2 (2002): 107.
[14] Ibid., 109-19.

"nature" in Gao's writings can be traced within a few discussions.

Thomas Moran's essay about nature in *Soul Mountain* seems to be the most informative discussion among others. Through a subtle analysis of the subject of nature in the novel, Moran tries to reveal how nature, which is typified by the south-western primeval forests, defines the specialty of the novel as well as the thematic intention behind its narration. The subject of nature, in Moran's opinion, refers to the three successive stages of degraded nature, national allegory and the prototype of being that is revelatory to an understanding of the self, death and language.[15] With the local flora and fauna being presented in a taxonomically intricate way, nature in the novel is appreciated as a complicated and self-sustaining being instead of "a general philosophy of nature." The spontaneous being of nature keeps reminding the I-narrator of an image of *zizai zhi wu* (自在之物, thing-in-itself) that he has actually been seeking. The spontaneity of nature, as well as its indifference to human existence, meets up with the I-narrator's intention of escaping from meaning and the self. However, when the involvement with the spontaneity of nature prescribes yielding to death, which is signified by such horrible images in nature as the river of *minghe* (冥河, nether river) and *wanghe* (忘河, river of forgetting), the I-narrator fails to give up his life-related consciousness and the self.[16] Moran concludes that the ultimate theme of *Soul Mountain* is "a continually frustrated journey toward self-understanding."[17]

Root-seeking Literature

Gao was working on the novel *Soul Mountain* from 1982 to 1987 when the mainstream of literary creation in mainland China was marked with the trend of *xungen wenxue* (尋根文學, literature of seeking the roots), the representative writers of which include *Han Shaogong* (韓少功), *Mo Yan* (莫言) and *Jia Pingwa* (賈平凹).[18]

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[15] Thomas Moran, "Lost in the Woods: Nature in *Soul Mountain*," Modern Chinese Literature and Culture 14, no. 2 (2002): 208.
[16] Ibid., 210-29
[17] Ibid., 229.
[18] Kam Louie, "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South," The China Journal, no. 45 (2001): 146.

Although Gao normally rejects any attempt to assign him to a particular literary school or trend, a few critics still analyse some of his works in this context due to the simultaneous existence of his creative activities and the root-seeking school.

One prominent gesture of root-seeking literature, claims Kam Louie, is to seek alternative roots in a cultural, historical and geographic sense, which have played a realistic role in Chinese history while being suppressed by the orthodox Confucianism and Communism. Such a feature of the root-seeking school arouses both nostalgic obsession in Chinese readership and Oriental exotica in Western readership.[19] Allegedly, the "root" embedded in Gao's works is represented by the "escapist and spiritual elements" from Taoism/Buddhism and Oriental exotic tales that, along with Gao's modernist entry, subtly appeal to the Western readership as well as to the Swedish Academy.[20] With a discursive review based on some obvious misreading of the feminine issues in the novel *Soul Mountain,* and a supposition of Gao's catering to European readership with its specific subjects and styles, Louie shows his doubts implicitly toward Gao's qualification as a Nobel laureate, especially when he arbitrarily asserts that Gao "acknowledges" the novel's root-seeking quality in the novel.

Thomas Moran also skims the same topic of root-seeking in *Soul Mountain*: "[M]uch of *Soul Moutain* is typical roots literature in that it explores or imagines a Chinese tradition counter to the orthodox and based on the heritage of the ancient state of Chu [(楚)], Daoism, and the cultures of minority groups."[21]

Recluse Literature

Comparing Gao with Xu Wei (徐渭, 1521-1593), a reclusive literati living during the 16th century, Mabel Lee ascribes the metaphorical awareness in Gao's works to a recluse tradition of Chinese literati writing in the past.[22] Chinese literati tended to create scenes or an aura of seclusion in their metaphorical writings while

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[19] Ibid., 146.
[20] Ibid., 148-49.
[21] Moran, "Lost in the Woods," 209.
[22] Mabel Lee, "Returning to Recluse Literature: Gao Xingjian," in The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature, ed. by Joshua S. Mostow, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 611.

they were still physically lingering within the hustle and bustle of ordinary life. The ancient philosophical and literary masterpiece, *Daodejing* (道德經) for example, as well as a long history of religious practices of Taoism and Buddhism have helped form a tradition of this kind of recluse writing within the circle of literati. The reclusive motif within those writings tells of the writer's quest for a freer spiritual existence that cannot be realized in a severe political surrounding or a chaotic social reality. And in modern times, due to the political inroads and his personal advocacy of literature, Gao's literary creation goes back to the tradition of recluse literature with a more dramatically metaphorical awareness in his writing. With the "self" as the kernel of his writings for all time, Lee indicates, Gao develops a sense of fleeing as the formula for his metaphorically recluse writing.[23]

Carnivalesque Literature

Full of literary characters and fictional plots of all forms, Gao's novel *Soul Mountain* presents a cluster of mosaic images of the world within which the protagonists are travelling both physically and spiritually. From the perspectives of various narrators, a large body of storytelling conjoins numerous people and events rising from different times and spaces in the supposedly realistic journeys taken by the protagonists. The depictions of such a huge group of literary objects are interwoven in a kaleidoscopic spectrum, which seems to shed a series of dazzling effects on the readership. Compared with the dogmatic and tedious scenes of the literature of "Socialistic Realism" in mainland China, a magically realistic world constructed upon the diverse and dynamic civilian world seems extremely fascinating.

Accompanied by a reading of Bakhtinian theories on dialogic orientation of fictional discourse, especially within a context of restrained non-democratic surroundings, Shao-Pin Luo discusses the features of diversity and heterogeneity in Gao's novels on the three levels of polyphony, heteroglossia and carnival. According to the analysis of the three levels, the polyphonic voices brought forth by the device of pronouns as characters enrich the facets of a "single consciousness," while the

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[23] Ibid., 611-12.

heteroglossia dimensions of storytelling break down the monological "national mythology," and the carnival narrative about folk cultures presents the diverse scenes of a civilian world contrary to a stereotyped political world.[24] Also, Luo points out that in *Soul Mountain* Gao is focusing on a primitive and authentic southern culture that is opposite to the authoritarian and monological northern culture. To relocate the ever-marginalized southern culture in the map of Chinese civilization, Gao seems to energize his storytelling in several dimensions so that a dynamic local culture can be vividly represented. Gao's storytelling, indicates Luo, is accomplished "in different ways with various historical, political, philosophical, religious implications," and covers peoples with various identities, careers and ranks, and illustrates encounters with festivals, rituals and ceremonies.[25] By a multi-dimensional storytelling strategy, Gao's novels present carnivalesque qualities of a real and fluid folk custom, as meets with Bakhtin's account of "grotesque realism."

Literature of the Absurd

Liu Zaifu (劉再复) claims that the underlying poetics within Gao's writings can be identified as, rather than Shakespearean humanism and Goethean romanticism, a sense of the absurd that has been developed from Franz Kafka (1883-1924). According to Liu, Kafka reveals an essential absurdity behind world order and human existence with the notion of "nihility," which indicates human beings' predicament of getting nowhere in attempts to rest their bodies and souls. Different from the absurdity of world order beyond the Self which Kafka was actually focusing on, Gao concentrates his insights on the absurdity inside the Self, i.e., the chaos within the Self.[26]

The Individual and the Collective

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[24] Shao-Pin Luo, "Magic Mountain and Sacred Script: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Novels of Gao Xingjian," Critique 46, no. 3 (2005): 286.
[25] Ibid., 292-95.
[26] Liu Zaifu, "Cong Kafuka dao Gao Xingjian, Gao Xingjian xingguan meixue de lunshu tigang 從卡夫卡到高行健——高行健醒觀美學的論述提綱 (From Kafka to Gao Xingjian, An Outline of the Discussion on Gao Xingjian's Aesthetics of Self-Contemplation)," Mingbao yuekan 明報月刊 (Mingbao Monthly), no. 9 (2005): 90.

It is Gao's uncompromising attitude toward authoritarian political power that caused the banning of his work in mainland China. During the early 1980s, the publication of Gao's treatise of *A Preliminary Exploration of Modern Fictional Technique* triggered large scale attacks on his literary advocacies, with several of his plays being banned from the stage. In addition to Gao's purely theoretical discussions labelled at that time as "*xiandai zhuyi* (現代主義, Modernism)," which was regarded as a provocative voice against the orthodox literary principle of "Socialistic Realism," some materials in Gao's literary works were narrowly interpreted as connotative attacks on the most recent history of the communist regime, and infuriated the ideological authorities. What has been debated in Gao's case is not whether Gao's literary creation is offensive to the establishment of a nation, but whether an individual, especially when it comes to dissent, deserves the freedom to release his own voices.

In an essay outlining the brief history of Gao's literary creation, Sylvia Li-Chun Lin focuses her research on the thematic appeal of Gao's two novels. One of the major themes of Gao's works, indicates Lin, is "the relationship between the individual and the collective entity, which can be a society or a small group of people."[27] Meanwhile, given that Gao is dealing with "the collective" as an existence that keeps enclosing the individual life, Lin switches the thematic format to the Self vs. the Other.[28] To deal with this relationship, Gao sets a "balanced distance" between the Self and the Other by placing the local civilian culture opposite to the authoritarian Confucian tenets instead of the totalitarian political principles. Secondly, as an outcome of the distancing process, scepticism is taken as "an inherent prerequisite for questioning the orthodox ideology and restoring the legitimacy of minority traditions." Finally, a combination of distance and scepticism helps achieve the "alienation effect" once conducted by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), one of Gao's favourite playwrights.[29] Although Lin mentions Gao's interests in revealing human inner being, she does not

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[27] Sylvia Li-Chun Lin, "Between the Individual and the Collective: Gao Xingjian's Fiction," World Literature Today 75, no. 1 (2001): 14.
[28] Ibid., 15.
[29] Ibid., 15-18

go further and investigate alienation within the Self, which seems to produce more impressive Others in Gao's works.

Based on a reading of Carl Jung's notions of primordial unconsciousness and visionary creation of arts, Mabel Lee illustrates Gao's anti-collective literary stance as a negative note to Jung's thinking. Since physical reality derives from psychical reality, analyses Lee of Jung's claims, the primordial/psychological unconsciousness is the source of visionary creation. At this point an artist is both a personal man and, most of all, a "collective man" who reflects on the primordial "collective unconsciousness" so that his works can meet the spiritual needs of the society.[30] While pondering the case of Lu Xun (魯迅) and his patriotism, Gao attributes Chinese intellectuals' submission to political passion to a national collective unconsciousness. As for himself, Gao claims literary creation as his own business, as might be the outcome of either his sufferings from political restrictions and physical death, or of his discovery of the necessity for an individual to affirm his self while living between "[the] totalitarian regimes of the East and the materialistic, commodity-oriented societies of the West."[31] Thus Gao's notion of "without isms" seems a manifestation of his commitment to "cold literature," the one that is supposed to isolate the self from the collective appeals in literary creation.

Exploring the inner-Being of a Detached Self

While a few researchers focus on the thematic implication within Gao's novels of the conflicts between the Self and the Other, Kwok-kan Tam identifies the conflicts inside the Self as the major pursuit of Gao's writing. Tam's judgement comes from his observation of the division between consciousness and unconsciousness that first arose with the disciplinary development of psychoanalysis, as well as the trend of theatrical representation based on language as the reflection of psychological drives and conflicts within the Self.[32] As Tam claims, the prominent innovation Gao carries out to explore conflicts in the Self is the switch of the pronouns of "I," "you" and "he"

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[30] Lee, "Gao Xingjian on the Issue of Literary Creation for the Modern Writer," 25-28.
[31] Ibid., 31-34.
[32] Tam, "The Politics of Recognition," 8-9.

as the objectified subjectivities of the Self. Through the ensuing shift of points of view, the Self is successfully detached, and different aspects of the Self are disclosed. The notion of detachment/transcendence of the Self seems rooted in the philosophical advocacy of Laozi (老子) and Zhuangzi (莊子), who initiated the philosophical tradition of Taoism, and has been transformed by Gao into a literary survey of "the ultimate meaning of life, of human existence."[33]

Liu Zaifu speaks highly of Gao's exploration of *neibu zhuti jianxing* (内部主體間性, interrelated inner subjectivities) when he focuses on the theme of absurdity in Gao's writings. Gao's literary innovation lies in a representation of the absurdity of human life with three pronouns of "I," "you" and "he" as the three dimensions of human consciousness. A method of x*ingguan* (醒觀, alienated self-contemplation) originating from Zen Buddhism works as "the third eye" to scrutinize the weaknesses and flaws of human nature, so that the reality of human existence is acknowledged as well as transcended. And this sort of self-contemplation over the absurd existence of the Self is far beyond the analytical and logical entries of literature. It is a breakthrough from both the dialectics of literary representation and traditional literary tastes such as Romanticism and Realism.[34]

"Re-visioning" of the World

It is the extrinsic creative features of "modernism," "avant-garde" and "experimentalism" that brought Gao's recognition by the West as well as the non-recognition of the ideological authorities in China. Besides the implied anti-orthodox position Gao takes to break away from the dogmatic and stifling principles of artistic creation, the terms reflect Gao's artistic innovations embedded in both his theatrical and fictional writings. While discussing Gao's theatrical experiments, which does not have to be limited to his theatrical works, Kwok-kan Tam shows an acute insight into the pivot between Gao's personal partiality to such dramatists as Brecht and Beckett and his specific innovations of theatrical

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[33] Tam, "the Politics of Recognition," 12-13.
[34] Liu Zaifu, "From Kafka to Gao Xingjian," 91-93.

representation. Brechtian and Beckettian theatres, as Tam indicates in his essay, surrender the logical and rational principles of Western positivistic philosophy developed from the Aristotelian tradition, and develop, especially in the case of Beckett, a non-logical/linear and non-rational theatrical form. Subsequently Tam values Gao's execution of this anti-positivistic representation as a "re-visioning" of the world, which works as the cornerstone of Gao's theatrical experiments.[35] Due to the evident intertexture of his theatrical and fictional writings, the aspects of non-logical and non-rational representation also characterize Gao's fictional creation.

Language

Literature is an art of language since it determines that every individual writer is supposed to carry out his/her unique artistic perceptions and identities through writing. Regardless of different literary genres, styles and tastes, language should be placed at the ground level of literary pyramids. Since language is also a delicate product of mental activities and social history, it keeps changing along with the development of human civilization. During the process of linguistic evolution, the ongoing outcomes of literary endeavours taken by generations of writers keep enriching the infinite possibilities of linguistic expression. At this point, a productive writer is supposed to be the one who, from time to time, is fully conscious of the qualities as well as the innovations of his/her application of language.

While stating that "Gao Xingjian's fiction is not the result of undisciplined artistic genius,"[36] Mabel Lee points out that "in his literary endeavours he is single-minded in his quest for authentic linguistic expression of his perceptions of reality. His attention to language involves all the senses and he draws on an extensive knowledge of aesthetics."[37] By displaying an excerpt from the novel *Soul Mountain*, Lee confirms Gao's ingenious application of auditory senses to his written language, that is supposed to be read aloud to "remove the silence of the written language."[38]

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[35] Tam, "The Politics of Recognition," 8.
[36] Lee, "Pronouns as Protagonist," 235.
[37] Ibid., 242.
[38] Ibid., 243.

The auditory identity of language seems to be an important experimental field for his writing when Gao is dealing with language. He even describes the intonations and moods as the soul of his literary language, which help him to capture vivid feelings about life.[39] At this point, Gao is not a writer who is very carefully working on the superficial rhetoric of his language, but one who cares more about the latent mechanism of words. The deep reason behind Gao's specifically artistic stance in dealing with language seems to be rooted in his philosophical pondering over the constraints of literary text in terms of its prescribed form as a linguistic reflection of life. He argues that language is not the most efficient medium speaking of being descriptive of the world, since the normal response aroused by literary language is not visual images but mental impressions.[40] Hence for Gao the most fundamental function of language within literary creation is to transform the feelings instead of the images of life due to the intrinsic merits of language, which define language as more expressive and less descriptive. Allegedly, "in the novel of *Soul Mountain*," Gao notes that he is "trying to break the barriers between the narrative and prose,"[41] as can also be seen as one of Gao's conscious endeavours in incorporating various literary genres into his fictional narrative.

Furthermore, in a few of his essays Gao talks about the specific grammatical features of the language of Chinese, which have reinforced technical experiments within his writings. One of the features, as Kwok-kan Tam analyses it, is the "flexible and interchangeable subject positions" in Chinese sentences, which leads to the "changing subject positions and changing points of view" in Gao's plays and fictions.[42] And the frequent shift of pronouns in Gao's novels, indicates Gao, creates "a sense of distance" or "psychological space" within the Self.[43] Beyond any linguistic and psychoanalytical sense, this manipulation of pronouns as protagonists, according to Tam, reflects a "flowing subjectivity" of the Self revealed by Zen Buddhist thoughts, that characterize Gao's literary theories.[44]

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[39] Gao, "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxuexiezuo," 8.
[40] Ibid., 11.
[41] Ibid., 24.
[42] Tam, "The Politics of Recognition," 10.
[43] Gao, "The Case for Literature," trans. Mabel Lee. PMLA 116, no. 3 (2001): 600.
[44] Tam, "The Politics of Recognition," 10-11.

Chapter Two

Cold Literature: Gao's Poetics of Writing

1. The Rudiment of Cold Literature: Gao's Views on Fiction

An anthology of Gao's short stories, *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* (給我老爺買魚竿, Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandpa), was published in Taiwan in February 1989. In the postscript of the book,[1] Gao claims that the era dominated by literary principles that require plots, characters and settings to be concretely constructed in fictional writing has now gone. Meanwhile, he proposes three new categories that he is trying to remap in his writings. First of all, the structure of plots, a fundamental feature of fiction, is replaced by a process of linguistic realization intended to stimulate in the readership a clearer perception of reality. Secondly, instead of an omniscient view of the characters, the interchangeable personal pronouns provide readers with flexible points-of-view as well as distances to identify what the characters are supposed to perceive. Thirdly, with the discarding of a purely objective depiction of settings, the fictional narration adopts impressions, which vary according to different mental states, to convey one's reflection of the outside world.[2]

Based on such a speculation over the issues of fictional representation, two aspects of Gao's fictional writing can be expected. On the one hand, the proposition Gao holds about fiction launches a revolutionary switch from the conventional literary canons dominating fictional creation. It reflects Gao's intention of reshaping fictional narrative by what Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) called the "varying, unknown and uncircumscribed spirit," instead of the "conventional slavery materialism,"[3] which highlights the modernity of Gao's literary representation. On the other hand, rather than leading the readership into an empirical perception of a

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[1] The article titled Postscript was originally written in November 1987 at Beijing as it notes in the book, and a few days later Gao left China permanently.

[2] Gao, "Ba 跋 (Postscript)," in Gei wo laoye mai yugan 給我老爺買魚竿 (Buying Fishing-rod for My Grandpa), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2000), 260-61.

[3] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in Narrative/Theory, ed. David H. Richter, (New York: Longman, 1996), 59-60.

secondary world, Gao is actually dedicated to working out a subtle personal reaction toward the world that is deeply rooted within a writer's own history and traumas. A painstaking self-dissection, which helps unfold the intricate and heterogeneous "pattern of atoms"[4] of human consciousness, features Gao's works with a serious literary exploration into the field of the human spirit in the modern era. Moreover, a multi-angular and discursive inspection into the human inner-being provides the ever varying and alienating narrative focus of Gao's "Cold Literature."

In the same article Gao is trying to further articulate the specific function of fiction, namely literature in its broader sense, in that the character of literature needs to be differentiated from that of other humanities such as politics, ethics, sociology, philosophy, history and cultural studies.[5] For Gao, the ultimate and unique character of literature is to enrich the perception of human beings through an exclusively linguistic and literary approach, which is absolutely beyond the reach of the other disciplines.[6] At this point, Gao's idea may upset today's proponents of cultural studies that are in favour of either an inter-disciplinary approach to literary interpretation, or prefer to build social and historical models through all kinds of rigidly disciplined interpretations of literature. It is not argued here whether Gao's isolation in a literary sense deviates from the trend of a systematic fusion of the knowledge and experiences from different disciplines. Gao's reflection on literature as a self-enclosed entity to deal with the inner-world of human beings responds to such ontological questions as "what is literature?" and "what should literature do with the reality?" As a writer who has experienced the extremely dramatic historical moments in mainland China, Gao insists that writers are, whether from the moral or artistic sense, too weak to undertake all the burdens of human beings. What a writer can fulfill is no more than to transcribe the fact that human beings are exactly alike when beset by such burdens.

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[4] Ibid., 60.
[5] Gao, "Ba," 61.
[6] At this point, Gao seems to overturn his own ideas that elements of social sciences can be manipulated into modern fictional representation, like in the case of Tolstoy. See Gao, "Xiaoshuo de weilai 小說的未來 (The Future of Fictions)," in Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan 現代小說技巧初探 (A Preliminary Exploration of Modern Fictional Technique), (Guangzhou: Huangcheng chubanshe 花城出版社, 1982), 120.

2. Cold Literature, and a Set of Key Relations

The concept of "*lengde wenxue* (冷的文學, Cold Literature)" can be traced through Gao's essays of *Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue* (我主張一種冷的文學, I Advocate A Kind of Cold Literature) (1990), *Meiyou zhuyi* (沒有主義, No Isms) (1993) and his Nobel speech, *Wenxue de liyou* (文學的理由, The Case for Literature) (2000). Sufficiently reflected in these articles is Gao's advocacy of a literature that is pursuing "*lengyan jingguan* (冷眼靜觀, distanced gaze with cold eyes)," an alienated perception/contemplation, to human inner being and the outer world. The aesthetic connotation of *leng* (冷, cold) lies in the alienation/distance of literary representation as well as the authenticity of the represented.

In its relationship with society, Cold Literature insists on the self-sustained principles and patterns of literature, repelling any agitation and temptation from outside of literature. As a sheer spiritual product of humanity, literature is urged to keep intact from the influence of political power, which is typified by the uproar of *wenxue geming* (文學革命, Literary Revolution) and *geming wenxue* (革命文學, Revolutionary Literature) that obsessed Chinese literature throughout the 20th century, as well as the influence of the marketplace, a modern tyrannical force that brings no justice to literature for its sake of "best seller."[7] Although Cold Literature denies the function of social critique that costs literature its freedom of exploring the intrinsic human being, literary creation that defines a writer's fundamental being still keeps interacting with society with all its ideological and critical aspects.[8]

In its relationship with the writer, Cold Literature embraces a writer's freedom to pursue his individually spiritual characteristics with the absence of collective wills operated by, for example, political groups and movements.[9] For Gao, a writer is neither a saviour nor a prophet as he might to some extent be expected.

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[7] Gao, "Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue 我主張一種冷的文學 (I Advocate A Kind of Cold Literature)," in Meiyou zhuyi 沒有主義 (No Isms), (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地圖書有限公司, 2000), 19.
[8] Gao, "Wenxue de liyou 文學的理由 (The Case for Literature)," in Wenxue de liyou 文學的理由 (The Case for Literature), (HK: Mingbao chubanshe, 2001), 48-49.
[9] Gao, "Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue," 20.

Only if this detrimental self-deception or self-illusion is cast out of his mind, can a writer posit himself on the same level with other beings, developing a more accurate insight into the chaos within his own being. By doing so a writer is able to come to the point that there is no hierarchy, superiority or opposition among individual creatures.[10]

In its relationship with the object literature is dealing with, while claiming an absolute truth about the world to be either unapproachable or suspicious, Cold Literature seeks the truth on the basis of an authentic perception of the world, with alienated perception/contemplation as its major appliance. For Gao, human perception of the world is actually the reflection of the self/ego toward the world, and the so-called "literary reality" comes from the perceptual reality of the world. At this point, modern literature adopts perceptual subjectivity, instead of the omniscient narrator, to mirror the reality. Moreover, in Gao's opinion, the world above perception is beyond the concerns of literature.[11] Differently from the psychoanalytic approach in dealing with the perceptual subjectivity in modern Western literature, Gao adopts the alienated-contemplation as his literary approach toward the inner-subjectivities of the Self.[12] In other words, the perspective taken by the psychoanalytic approach is from an insider within the self, but the point-of-view carried by the alienated-contemplation is from an outsider who always keeps a proper distance from the Self.

3. Fugitive: A Peripheral Position of Cold Literature

Based on the three categories of relationship between Cold Literature and society, writer and the object of literature, an ensuing position for literature to take is not to "intervene," but to be "fugitive" from the superficial forms of the world such as political and social institutions.[13] Due to such a literary position attributed to Gao's writing, Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), the former mayor of Taipei City, criticized

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[10] Gao, "The Case for Literature," 39-40.
[11] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 16.
[12] Ibid., 16.
[13] Ibid., 20.

Gao's novels as displaying "*quanru zhuyi* (犬儒主義, cynicism)" when Gao visited Taiwan in 2001.[14] What is ironic of the meeting of Gao and Ma is that to discuss literature officially with a governmental official is exactly the kind of situation from which Gao is supposed to be "fugitive." Although Gao subscribes to the belief that a writer's independence does not have to exclude his opinions on political and social issues, his major task is to repel pressure on individuals from the public domain. When facing intervention from the outer world, unlike social sciences and a few other humanities that can to some extent interfere in social life, literature is not capable of responding as effectively as it has been ambitiously urged to. What literature is truly capable of is no more than to explore the infinite perceptions of human beings as well as the world that actually originates in perceptual subjectivities. At this point, in order to catch an authentic world that is created by human perceptions, Cold Literature urges the writer to locate himself at the peripheries of both the society and human inner being so that the process of "alienated-perception" or "alienated-introspection" can be achieved.[15]

Gao's "Cold Literature" is not intended to detach itself from being grounded in life, but from the fantasy of life. The whole 20th century is buzzed with numerous ambitious interpretations of the world, and truly seems a period full of ideological fantasies. This is especially evident when these ideological fantasies intrude into the public domain with spiritual restrictions and personality cults as the outcome. Literature's innate need to acquire and present careful insights into the real human being is doomed to be swept away by the collective ecstasy and hysteria that seem to originate from the primitive fear of being separated from human groups. Gao's pursuit of "Cold Literature" is to reduce all kinds of fantasies within the human mind as well as to explore the layers of individual beings caught within a social structure that is filled with clichés of ideological fantasies. For Gao, the realistic quality typifies the supreme ethics to which literature ought to conform,[16] and the so-called reality originates from an individual's authentic perception of both the

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[14] "Gao Xingjian chuangzuo liqiu baituo zhongguo qingjie 高行健創作力求擺脫中國情結 (In His Works Gao Strives not to Be Influenced by the China Complex)," Mingbao 明報 (Mingbao Daily News), 2 February 2001.
[15] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 20.
[16] Gao, "The Case for Literature," 42.

world and the Self.[17] In order to capture the perceptual reality springing from one's complicated (un)consciousnesses, Gao carries out a consistent representation of the inner-subjectivities of individual beings. Also to preserve the representation from the interference of the fantasies within the Self one is easy to fall into, Gao chooses alienated-contemplation as well as alienated-introspection to set the distances that the writer needs to achieve a more accurate perspective into an individual's inner-world.

4. No Isms: the Transcendental Aesthetics of Cold Literature

Gao's advocacy of "Cold Literature" is a manifesto aimed at returning literature to its artistic origin, which seems still a critical task under the politically-oriented literary orthodoxy. The supposition that literature is "either instructive or amusing," as Henry James (1843-1916) described the literary scene of Western Europe in the late 19th century,[18] has shrouded mainland China's artistic circles which are still engaged in self-censorship during the process of artistic representation.

Refusing to be attributed to any specific literary school or category, Gao highly values the independent status held by a writer who is supposed to be exclusively responsible for his works. A rigid uncompromising stand of staying away from ideological centers can be discerned in both his literary practices and criticism. More than just an advocacy of a specific literary taste, the notion of Cold Literature reflects Gao's realistic, as well as metaphysical concerns, about literature, with an underlying aversion toward the ongoing suppression of Chinese literature throughout the 20th century.

From a realistic standpoint, the repression of Chinese literature in the 20th century provides Gao with a background from which to scrutinize the development of Chinese literature under unprecedented extreme conditions of ideological interferences. It is the flooding of Western philosophical and social theories along

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[17] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 16.
[18] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Narrative/Theory, ed. David H. Richter, (New York: Longman, 1996), 43.

with the launch of the New Culture Movement (新文化運動) in the middle of the 1910s, that marked the modernization of Chinese literature, and carried it into a turbulence of various literary doctrines and experiments. Although it has to be acknowledged that due to a free pursuit of literary representation modern Chinese literature arrived at its golden age during the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese literature had developed along with the disputes between the Independents and the Leftists.[19] Shen Congwen (沈從文, 1902-1988) and Zhang Ailing (張愛玲, 1920-1995), two important figures on the literary scene before 1949, worked out outstanding fictional writings with a combination of modern narrative skills and traditional literary aura, but they still did not bring Chinese literature to worldwide acknowledgement. Once the communist propaganda took control of the artistic and literary creation after 1949, ending dynamic literary disputes and creativity, Chinese literature came into the phase of "proletarian literature" that was supposed to meet with the needs of *gongnongbing* (工農兵, workers, farmers and soldiers). Under Mao's literary directions of "Revolutionary Realism (革命現實主義)" and "Revolutionary Romanticism (革命浪漫主義)," in which almost all the subject matters of literary creation exclusively focused on socialistic transformation,[20] few independent literary works could be expected within such a stifling literary atmosphere. When the political routine of "Proletarian Cultural Revolution (無產階級文化革命)" ended in 1976, the ideological suppression applied to literary creation became less rigid, but the institution of literary censorship as well as the self-censorship conducted by writers still confined the free expression of individual voices. During the late 1970s and 1980s when *shanghen wenxue* (傷痕文學, Wound Literature), *xiangtu wenxue* (鄉土文學, Nativist Literature) and *xungen wenxue* (尋根文學, Root-seeking Literature) appeared seeking consolation in the patterns of reminiscence and homesickness, few writers could freely express their spiritual suppressions. Till the late 1990s and early 2000s, when a dispirited sentiment

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[19] C. T. Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 115-40.
[20] Lan Yang, "The Ideal Socialist Hero: Literary Conventions in Cultural Revolution Novels," in China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 186-87.

permeated literary writings together with a large amount of antiquity recalling clichés, an upsurge of *shenti xiezuo* (身體寫作, body writing) among the women writers arose as a by-product of restrictions on the themes and representations of literature. Having witnessed the sufferings undergone by Chinese literature as a result of struggles among all kinds of philosophical, social and political ideologies in the 20th century, Gao realizes that literature must be rescued from the tortures of various ideologies so that it can return to its natural status, and he prefers to call this kind of nature-returning literature the "Cold Literature."[21]

Gao has truly fulfilled his promise of always keeping a proper distance from any center of authority so as to locate the writer's individual position within the map of intricate discourses in modern times. It is based on Gao's argument for the transcendence of human existence over human reason that a key aesthetic principle of Cold Literature comes into being: *meiyou zhuyi* (沒有主義, no isms). During the 20th century, views of value entitled with various isms have flourished and inter-nourished each other on an unprecedented scale in the West. Having resided in Paris since 1987, Gao has long questioned whether the proliferation of theories and theoretical schools would bring a smooth promotion to the cognition about human beings. For him, literary creation, unlike many other human activities, has always been an individual affair, with each individual writer responsible for carrying out his own pursuit of a perfect literature within his mind. Any compelling or abrupt grouping of ideas can do nothing but eliminate the spontaneous energy of individual creativity, which is the fundamental factor animating every single piece of literary work. Unlike ideologies that are developed from human reason, literary delicacy is born from an individual writer's temperamental and artistic existence as an integral whole, which is far more realistic and delicate than human reason. Based on this, Gao calls into question all kinds of artificial views of value except for an authentic being of humankind that comes to define the superlative pursuit of literature.[22]

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[21] Gao, "Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue," 18-19.
[22] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 17.

Chapter Three

Inner Subjectivities: the Impulsive Mechanism of the Self

Is Harmony Plausible?

In his incisive memoir *My Many Selves*, Wayne C. Booth (1921-2005) ponders the feasibility of "a plausible harmony" of one's being. For him, the "Self-Splits" have induced intense conflicts that keep afflicting those diverse Wayne Booths. With a "Supreme Being" urging the pursuit of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, people attempting to acquire harmony either experience frustrating failure or fall short of their goal.[1] It appears that there exists a Lower Being preventing people from constructing harmonious physicality and spirituality that can only be obtained by an awareness of the Supreme Truth. In a philosophical tradition dating from Aristotle, argues Warren Montag, truth or rationality is almost a universally valid proposition that an individual has to accede to in order to escape the particularity of individualized existence.[2]

Yet in Gao's works, the being of various inner subjectivities, the Many Selves in Booth's case, constitutes the truth beyond rationality, which typifies a universally individualized existence. The essence of life does not reside in ideologies or collective wills that are outside one's individualized existence, but in inner subjectivities, the basic construction of one's identity. With splits and conflicts as the fundamental features of spontaneous beings signalled by inner subjectivities, a harmonious life exists in the eternal here and now, the instantaneous moments in the course of one's life. In Gao's philosophy, all obsessions originate from entanglements with the Other, such as the past, the future and all kinds of other existences. In terms of its breakaway from the Other, "Cold Literature" tells of Gao's belief in the individuality and instantaneity of human beings.

This chapter investigates the emotional perturbations of the highly

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[1] Wayne C. Booth, My Many Selves, the Quest for a Plausible Harmony, (Logan, Utah State University Press, 2006), 290.
[2] Warren Montag, "René Descartes (1596-1650) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677): Beginnings;" In The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory, ed. Julian Wolfreys, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 4.

individualized identities that emerge in Gao's fictional writings. The dynamic working of such perturbations will be categorized in such inner subjectivities as obsession with death, desire, fear, loneliness, purgatorial will, identity puzzles and some imperceptible traces of the human subject, which accumulate to become a detailed representation of the wavering individual psyches. The paradoxical status of psychological realism, as the narratologist Dorrit Cohn argues, is a distinctive source of the novel's artistry.[3]

1. Death: A Graceful Consolation to the Pains of Life

Being the preordained destiny, death is the innermost perplexity of human beings. Exclusively human activities as well as the inner subjectivities are embodied in the aspiration for life and escape from death. How death is properly perceived is one of the basic concerns occupying human minds. Correspondingly, among other issues, death represents the ultimate living situation of human beings, and has always been explored in literature. In Freud's formulation of "the aim of all life is death," death seems to act as a supreme drive that no organism has the wish to change. Yet orbiting the axis of death, the alive state is forced by external tensions to "diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated detours."[4]

In Gao's writings, concerns about death seem especially dominant, as can in part be traced to his specific experiences of the shadow of death and, as a consequence, the inclination to contemplate the subject. Once approached and then forsaken by death, as a writer Gao seems to step closer to the fatality of human existence. In the novel *Soul Mountain*, Gao draws upon his own experiences of escaping death as the departure point of the novel, and constantly weaves the protagonist's obsession with death into the texts. A perplexed concern over heavy burdens, such as death in human life, brings Gao's writing into surges of quests for

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[3] Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 5-6.

[4] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 38-49.

the *bi'an* (彼岸, the other shore). To serve the purpose well, Gao adopts alienated perspectives in the novel to reduce the realistic sufferings, so that a sharp and undisturbed vision of human destiny can be achieved.

The protagonist's journey to Soul Mountain starts out with an ongoing fear of death and ends up with an eventual transcendence of all fatalities. After being inaccurately diagnosed with lung cancer, the protagonist of *I* embarks on a wandering trip to the south, with a concern for how his vitality can be revived. When the journey comes to its end, *I* experiences an imaginary death on the top of an ice-caped mountain, as might be inferred from a series of fantasies emerging from the protagonist's indulgence in the orchestral music. A journey lasting thousands of miles in months is, in fact, a pilgrimage leading the protagonist not only out of the fear of death, but also through a fantastic process of death. No matter whether the protagonist reaches the other shore at last, as is actually beyond his expectation while he is heading to Soul Mountain, death appears no longer devastating, but rather a solemn and graceful consolation for all the pains an individual has been carrying:

> . . . a never before experienced limpidity, a totality of purity and freshness. You perceive a barely discernible subtle, almost soundless sound, it turns transparent, is carded, filtered, clarified. You are falling and while falling you float up, so gently, and there is no wind, no physical burdens and no rashness in your emotions. Your whole body is cool, your body and mind listen intently, your whole body and mind hear this soundless, billowing music. In your conscious mind this thread of gossamer becomes smaller but increasingly clear, appears right before your eyes, delicate like a strand of hair, and also like a crack of light. The extremity of the crack fuses with the darkness, loses its form, expands, transforms into faint, minute points of light, then boundless countless particles, enveloping you in this cloud blanket of distinct particles. Minute points of light form clusters, drift into motion, turn into a mist-like nebula, keep slowly transforming, gradually solidifying into a dark moon tinged with blue. The moon within the sun turns grey-purple, instantly spreads out, but the center further condenses, turns dark red, gives off bright purple rays. You close your eyes to cut the glare but can't. Trembling fear and hope rise from the depth of your heart, at the edge of the darkness you hear music, this solidified sound gradually expands, spreads and sparkling crystals of sound penetrate your body. You can't work out where you are. The particles of bright crystals of sound permeate your body and mind from all directions. As a mass of long notes take shape, there is a rigorous middle note, you can't catch the melody but can

> perceive the richness of the sounds. It links up with another mass of sounds, intermingles, unfolds, turns into a river which disappears and appears, appears and disappears. A dark blue sun circles within an even darker moon, you hold your breath enraptured, stop breathing, reach the extremity of life. But the force of the pulsating sounds becomes stronger and stronger, lifts you up, pushes you towards a high tide, a high tide of pure spirituality. Before your eyes, in your heart, in your body oblivious to time and space, in the continual surge of sustained noise, of reflected images in the dark sun within the dark moon, is a blast exploding exploding exploding exploding explo- explo- explo- explo- -ding –ding –ding –ding – then again absolute silence. You fall into an even deeper darkness and again feel your heart pulsating, discern physical pain. The fear of death of the living body is concrete like this, the physical body you failed to abandon recovers its sensitivity.[5]

Being afflicted with the threat of death, the protagonist travels to the south, with Soul Mountain as a randomly chosen destination of his wanderings. As the cited passage indicates, on the top of Soul Mountain the protagonist of *you* experiences the process of both death and rebirth in an instant. Contrary to what the protagonist has been expecting, the experience of death brings him a sheer spiritual joy as well as transcendence from physical life. Even though all the magnificent images about death arise from the protagonist's imagination, they do represent an individual's perception of the untraceable end and beginning of life. According to the fictional depiction, life ends as well as starts with the fluctuation of *hundun* (混沌, Chaos), which is combined with *taiyin* (太陰, the negative) and *taiyang* (太陽, the positive). The ferryboat of death transfers the descending life to its equivalent one on the other shore. With every fluctuation of *hundun*, life is transformed through the process of death into the very beginning of a newly-harmonized one, which is going to experience another rise and fall of *taiyin* and *taiyang*. What typifies Gao's metaphysical creation in the same novel, besides his meditation on the topic of death, resides in the journey as both a literary and thematic structure, which houses the protagonist's wanderings as the in-between reviving process of life. It is through the journey that the protagonist, the character with *you* and *I* as its two equivalent identities, is able to transcend the fear of death to an enlightenment of death as the nature of life. Meanwhile, the journey also symbolizes the distance one has to

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[5] Gao, Soul Mountain, 503-4.

traverse to accomplish a harmonious being, which deserves to accommodate various inner subjectivities.

Almost ten years after the release of *Soul Mountain*, in his latest novel, *Yigeren de shengjing* (一個人的聖經, One Man's Bible) (1999), Gao phases out of his meditation on the topic of death, which is so obvious in the former novel, and instead shows his concern about the secular side of human life. The reason for this transition probably resides in the fact that Gao has stepped out of the shadow of death, which had prompted his views about life and death years earlier. He contrives to display an individual's pragmatic compromise, especially after a lifetime's struggle within the political violence as well as the absurdity of human existence. Different from the protagonist's eventual extrication from his obsession with death in *Soul Mountain*, the protagonist in *One Man's Bible* is a writer who has developed a cynical attitude to life after surviving the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, the fear of death still plays a decisive role in forming the protagonist's instinctive response to his surroundings. During the Cultural Revolution, the protagonist of *he* becomes involved in the outrageous group fighting and later escapes from Beijing to the countryside in order to survive in a crazy ants' nest where "an ant can be squashed underfoot any time, any place."[6] Once out of the "swarms of ants" for good, unexpected death becomes the only retarding limitation for the protagonist of *you*, who is the equivalent version of *he* at the present time. Before the advent of death as the ultimate experience of life, *you* pledges to "squirm as you transform" while consuming "the wonder of being human."[7] Instead of the semi-religious obsession with death as a consolation to the pains of life in *Soul Mountain*, a cynical complex highlighting the eternal "this instant" as the primacy of human life permeates the *you* chapters in *One Man's Bible*. The fear of death seems not impending any more to the protagonist ever since he departed from the specific time and place. On the contrary, a strong belief in momentary joys comes to function as a lubricant to the conflicts among inner subjectivities.

Gao's primary meditation on the topic of death in the form of literature can be

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[6] Gao, One Man' s Bible, 221.
[7] Ibid., 437.

traced back to his early short stories, which were composed during the 1980s when Gao regained the opportunity to write following the Cultural Revolution. One of the stories is *Pengyou* (朋友, Friend) (1980), which is about two men's conversation at a reunion thirteen years after the Cultural Revolution ends.[8] Upon the request of *I*, the protagonist's friend, *you*, recalls his experience of an abortive execution years ago when he was sentenced to death by the revolutionaries in a *niupeng* (牛棚, cowshed).[9] In contrast to the protagonists in Gao's two novels, who are reluctant to die with a reminiscence of the joys of being alive, *you* in *Friend* sees death as a liberation of himself from the tortures of daily life. It is the humiliation of being alive and the absurdity of the way one is put to death under an authoritarian regime that makes a person aspire to break off all relations with the world. Yet a will for the cheerfulness and dignity that human life deserves still resonates in the texts of the story. At the moment when *you* thought that he was struck down by a gunshot, what flashed into his mind was that he would never have the chance of listening to Mendelssohn with *I* again, a minute joy that comes to typify the instinct of being alive as a sign of rejecting death. Through depictions of the ridiculous way of putting people to death, the story seems intended to mirror a ludicrous, ignorant and absurd social reality that is full of unusual human death during a specific period. When asked by his friend why he did not go on writing, *I* responds with that he could not anticipate the final result of his writings. Besides the rigorous censorship during a time of the political suppression, what exactly prevented *I* from writing seems that he could not find a reasonable meaning for human life. After all, whether Gao himself finally approaches the meaning of life is still uncertain. "It's cheerful to be alive," the final words from the friend in the story, seem to uncover Gao's persistent philosophy about human existence, which is also evident in his novels.

2. Desire: Distorted Human Nature within Extreme Social Milieu

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[8] Gao, "Pengyou 朋友 (Friend)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chuban she, 2001), 25-36.

[9] During the Cultural Revolution, intellectual cadres from cities were sent to the cadre school in countryside for ideological correction. Their residence in the countryside was colloquially called *niupeng* (牛棚, cowshed) since all the Rightist intellectuals were denounced then as *niugui sheshen* (牛鬼蛇神, monsters of cows and demons of snakes).

A few passages in *Soul Mountain* as well as in *One Man's Bible* may seem aggressive to some readers since they contain quite detailed descriptions about sexualities. It is a rare case for a Chinese writer to apply audacious sexual depictions to his literary works since the issues related to sexualities were still constrained in mass media and literary creations in mainland China during the late 20th century. Although both of the novels were finished after Gao had left China in 1987, it was still a courageous step for a writer in exile to move to deal with sexual representation in an astonishingly direct way.

Defined as "the name that can be given a historical construct"[10] by Michel Foucault (1926-1984), or "the cultural dimension of sex"[11] by Nancy Armstrong, sexuality remains a sensitive issue for writers from certain cultural and historical background to be cautious of. To a greater or lesser degree, sexual representation in literature reflects people's instinctual elusion from the darkest thoughts or desires within the human mind. Yet it has to be admitted that Gao's view of life and literary representation has reached far beyond such issues due to a few of his disastrous encounters earlier in China. On the one hand, both his experiences during the Cultural Revolution and later after receiving a diagnosis of lung cancer made him re-evaluate the reality of life. A resurrected life after the disasters would definitely bring a new version of opinions about life to an individual's mind, so he does not have to worry about any elusion from the truth of being in the process of literary representation. On the other hand, due to his personal experiences Gao seems qualified to be a witness of how people's desires can be hidden, depressed and twisted within extreme living conditions. A direct display of man's desires touches the exact being as a kind of likelihood within human nature. And most importantly, the latter situation sublimates the literary representation of sexuality to the humanistic care over human desire, lest it falls into carnal nonsense.

To show how human desire varies, in *Soul Mountain* Gao deals with human

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[10] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Random House, 1980), 105.

[11] Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11.

sexuality on three levels: the natural, the distorted and the extreme. The conveying of these three aspects of human desire successfully shows the distortion and trauma that disguised civilization and modernization can induce in the primitive identity of human beings.

In *Soul Mountain* the protagonists of *you* and *I* have tender feelings for females, but the love affairs they have experienced and witnessed are quite different even though both *you* and *I* refer to the same individual. By repeatedly telling erotic and horrific tales to *she*, *you* seduces and falls into a deep affair with *she* in whom he indulges his lust, and finally, tires of *she*. The quest for Soul Mountain has been disguised as an excuse to lure *she* until *you* figures out that the affair has turned into a hell for him and ends it. The protagonist of *you* appreciates all the beautiful traits of girls, especially the feminine gestures and temperament. When, in chapter 56, *you* is accompanied by a group of young girls begging him to check their palms and tell their fortunes, he is so dizzied by the feminine air around him that he falls in love with and lusts for every hand from them. The desire of *you* for females can be traced to his loss of passion for life in a disciplined and boring environment in Beijing. Once he escapes to an exotic place and achieves enough distance for him to act as a stranger, he is so excited about getting rid of his mask that he presents uncontrolled love for females in a distorted way.

Nevertheless, with the removal of the disguising mask, human desire does not have to be a distorted one at all. When visiting an old town in the district of *Miaozu* (苗族, Miao minority), which is located in a remote intersection of four hinterland provinces, the protagonist of *I* unexpectedly experiences the primitive though natural expression of love at a *gehui* (歌會, singing competitive). By singing and dress-decorating at the singing competition, the aboriginals are looking for mates who respond in singing songs and perform the best. Without artificiality and deceit, the behaviour resulting from human love seems so pure and beautiful that *I* feels ashamed of approaching the girl who shows her intimacy to him. It is the sacred beauty of a natural being that scares and repels the spiritual impurity of *I*:

> I've never encountered this style of love. It's what I dream about but when it actually happens I can't cope.

> I should confess that the low bridge and upturned nose, high forehead, small mouth and expectant bright eyes of the Miao girl revived painful, tender feelings which had long since become forgotten memories. But I am instantly aware that I can no longer return to those pure passions. I must face the fact that I have become old. It is not just age and various other intangible differences even if she is right here and I can just reach out and take her with me. It amounts to the fact that my heart is old and I can no longer ignore all else and fall in love, body and heart, with a young woman. My relationships with women changed long ago and lost this instinctive youthful love . . . only lust remains. I'm afraid of shouldering the responsibility of even pursuing momentary happiness. I'm not a wolf but I would like to be a wolf, to return to nature, to go on the prowl. However, I can't rid myself of this human mind. I am a monster with a human mind and can find no refuge.[12]

Contrary to the experience in the old town of the *Miao* minority where *I* witnesses the undisguised expression of love, the stories about bloody sexual assaults during the Cultural Revolution that *you* keeps telling show how the savagery born of the evil within human nature reaches its horrible extremity in a society full of the turmoil of spiritual persecutions. While distorted desire is still aroused by sexual appeal, the extreme wreaking of desires develops into audacious crimes committed against females. Through the three stages of the manifestation of human sexual desire, Gao carefully explores the deteriorating process of the human soul in an accurate and humanistic way.

As a genre in the history of literature, *erotica* has always acted as a sustained genus in the tradition of world literature. The controversies over the legitimacy of pornography have not prevented some pornographic works from being acknowledged as literary masterpieces. The serious approach of such works as *Decameron*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (金瓶梅) resides in the underlying confidence of facing the reality of human condition. As suggested above, the insulting quality of representation of sexual desire usually comes from the elusion from the irresistible existence of dark thoughts within the human mind. Once the barrier is lifted, it would be as legitimate for literature to deal with sexual desire as psychoanalysis does. Although it is inappropriate to categorize Gao's novels as *erotica*, Gao has truly removed the barrier between free literary

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[12] Gao, Soul Mountain, 229.

representation and the innermost desires of human beings.

In Gao's writing, not only have the protagonists nothing to hide, but rather they are getting used to revealing more. In *One Man's Bible*, out of the rampant sexual experiences of the protagonists of *he* and *you* with females comes a Chinese Beat figure whose soul has been distorted during the Cultural Revolution and who devoted himself to endless quests for temporal and momentary happiness. The distorted desire displayed in the novel consists of the complicated subjectivity of the protagonist who, at the same time, shows his tender affection as well as scepticism toward females. A strand of deep sadness about the transience of life and love is clearly underlying the character's tendency to view his lifetime as a game.

3. Fear, to Escape the Decadence of Life within Myths

In Gao's literary works, fear is dealt with as another unavoidable inner subjectivity within one's personality. This sense of fear, along with other qualities, comes to define the nature of human existence in the face of such secular forces as power, death and catastrophic chaos. Based upon the fear of the possible loss of life, myths, as the order out of chaos, have been created throughout history to either subdue or strengthen human fear. Given that the subsistence of myths urges individuals' involvement within collective hypotheses, fear actually typifies "a delicate interplay between the individuality we express and the communities in which we participate."[13] Yet with the threatening decadence of life as a penalty for people's disbelief, the myths end up either being challenged or discarded by individuality. In his works, Gao carries out a close investigation into the issue of fear by placing it in various myths, the highly manipulated fictions about superior forces that can stand up to the mortality of human beings.

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, *Shilaoye* (石老爺, Grandpa Stone) is employed as a mythical figure, a legendary immortal hunter living alone on the mountain, to attest to people's fear of his unchallenged supremacy. Through his expert shooting

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[13] Carl G. Vaught, The Quest for Wholeness, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 3.

skills and dreadful incantations, *Shilaoye*'s authority, typified by the rifle hung on the wall of his stone house, has kept him intact from people and animals. As a half-deified mythical figure, *Shilaoye* has the wisdom and strength that protects him from death. All the elements within the myth help make *Shilaoye* into a god who can resist the terrestrial misfortunes the local villagers fear of. Ironically, such a god that is able to repel realistic suffering turns out to be a source of fear for the local people. *Shilaoye*'s immortality, symbolized by the rifle, causes the villagers to keep far from his stone house. As a naive figment of imaginings about mysterious supernatural forces, which had evolved over generations in the local civilian society, the myth about *Shilaoye* reflects people's primitive urge for a supreme order that can preserve them from the collapse of social relations. The discipline of keeping away from *Shilaoye*'s stone house prescribes a proper distance between human activities and nature. However, the reverence shown to *Shilaoye*'s indestructible vitality conveys people's longing for an imperishable spirit in spite of their mortal lives. With the absence of a developed social institution, the fear of a privileged supernatural force actually acts as the foundation of an ethical order.

The protagonist of *you* becomes the intruder who audaciously destroys the order preserved by the myth about *Shilaoye*. When *you* sneaks into the stone house and removes the cursed hunting rifle from the wall, the rifle breaks into pieces instantly and then unusual things happen:

> You move forward a step at a time, not daring to touch him in case he collapses, and reach out for the hunting rifle covered in grime and bear fat on the rock wall behind him. However, as soon as you grasp the barrel it crumbles as if it had been fried to a crisp. You immediately retreat, undecided as to whether you still want to go to see the place of the Queen Mother of the West.
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> Overhead there is an explosion of thunder, the Heavenly Court is angry! Heavenly soldiers and generals are pounding with the thigh bones of the Thunder Beast on huge drums made from the hides of walrus from the Eastern Ocean.
>
> Nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine white bats shriek and fly about the cliff cave. The mountain divinities have all awoken, huge boulders roll from the mountain top in an avalanche and the cliff completely collapses. It is as if a thousand mounted soldiers are galloping up from the earth and the whole mountain turns to smoke and dust.[14]

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[14] Gao, Soul Moutain, 437.

Acting like a rash atheist and personal hero, the protagonist of *you* ends up profaning the myth of *Shilaoye*, thus igniting the anger of heaven. A collapse of the mythical contract occurs with the break-up of human and divine existence as well as the visitation of horrible penalties on the human world. The uproars of a series of supernatural scenes testify to the divine existence, and make *you* witness an overarching order above the earthly world. Similarly, the journey toward Soul Mountain seems like a pilgrimage that makes the cynical protagonist convert to a supreme existence, or at least the deity of human spirits, since otherwise human beings would be lost in an appalling world without fears.

The fear of a perishable life as well as the unknown underlying the surface of human life gives rise to people's reverence for authority that normally exists in a secular order. As the outcome of the need for such a superior power, various myths have been invented to consolidate earthly illusions. A secular power may also reinforce itself by manipulating mass fear with carefully institutionalized myths. During the Cultural Revolution, the routine of class struggle and the cult of a supreme individual, secularized myths produced in the modern era, serve to found autocratic power on people's fear of ideological inspection and excommunication. Within an extremely disciplinary society, where even the monasteries are shut down for the sake of ideological remoulding, there is no social space for people to seek spiritual sufficiency without being subdued on the altar of a politically perceived utopia.

In *One Man's Bible*, Gao shows how the fear, evoked by a secular myth ignoring the civilian spiritual life, induces unprecedented cruel fighting among citizens in the nation. Like everyone else working in the same unit, the protagonist of *he* has been living a furtive life in a politically policed society. Motivated by the fear of being squashed under the political grinder, as well as spurred on by a momentary impulse to become a hero, *he* becomes the leader of one of the many groups in the fighting. When *he* eventually realizes that he is nothing more than a tiny piece on the chessboard of the central political struggle, *he* manages to flee the group fighting by applying to be sent to the countryside as a problematic intellectual

in need of ideological remoulding.

Living under the oppression of an intense fear, the protagonist of *he* is occupied by insane lusts for the female body, which becomes something he can rely on to distract him from the perilous reality. Even when the political extremism comes to an end, painful memories about his terrible history still overshadows his life so consistently that *he* has to proclaim his independence in front of the shadow of Mao to overcome his fear. Unlike the villagers' fear of supernatural power exposed in *Soul Mountain*, which posits an earthly order needed to sustain social relations, the nationwide fear of a secular power in *One Man's Bible* connotes an individual's indictment of the inhumane spiritual purification performed by a political dictatorship.

4. Loneliness: Wandering with the Key Lost

Like other human inner subjectivities, loneliness constructs another dilemma of human life by which people are easily overwhelmed. In its seesaw conflicts with complicated human traits and social stereotypes, loneliness stands for a typical living situation that is attractive as well as repellent to the human spirit. People elude loneliness since it reduces vitality. On the other hand, people seek loneliness when it helps preserve inherent human spirituality in turbulent surroundings. This dilemma also characterizes the status of Gao's Cold Literature, which tries to perform an alienated inspection into the reality of human existence as well as seeking to survive through sheer spiritual detachment.

On the journey of spiritual purgation in the novel *Soul Mountain*, the protagonist is chronically overwhelmed by impulses developing from his various selves, among which loneliness keeps as a turbulent inner subjectivity that has continually haunted him. The protagonist's obsession with loneliness can be induced by any unexpected catalyst such as a piece of awakening memory, a specific image, and even a dark shadow of his own figure projected onto a huge rock during the night. Now and then the writer imports paragraphs of streams of consciousness

showing how an individual loses his mental proprieties under the condition of loneliness, which contributes to a more incisive existence than his physical being.

In his loneliness, the protagonist of *you* cannot help trying to reminisce about the past. With a few residual images of the past looming into consciousness, *you* realizes that his previous selves have been scattered along with the disappearance of those houses, courtyards, streets and lanes where he had grown up. The elapse of time causes a solid barrier between the past and the present, leaving the protagonist alone outside his personal history. Hence the protagonist's indulgence in his childhood keeps being disrupted by the fact that he is always a stranger to the ever-elapsing self. It is the curtain crossing between the past and the present that makes the protagonist of *you* immerse himself in a query about the truth of time as well as of being in chapter 54. A sense of homeless loneliness permeating through the novel typifies the writer's reflection on the human destiny of vagrancy within a temporal reality that is doomed to be effaced by the passing of time.

Different from the vanished entrance into the past, the "key" in chapter 62 seems to provide people with a flexible approach into either the outer reality or one's inner world. However, a seemingly overwhelming pattern accompanying the flexibility is that people tend to keep missing the key to the door. With the key lost, *he*, a third-person version of the protagonist, loses the entrance into his former small messy room that can distance him from the outside world:

> As he goes along this busy street he feels more and more lonely and begins to sway as if he were sleepwalking. In the interminable noise of the traffic, in the glare of gaudy neon lights, he is squashed in the thronging crowds on the pavement. He wants to slow his pace but can't and is all the time being knocked and jostled by the people behind. If you look at him from an upstairs window over the street, he looks just like a discarded cork swirling helplessly as it floats down the gutter after the rain, together with dry leaves, cigarette packs, ice-cream wrappers, used take-away plastic plates and the paper wrappings from all sorts of snacks.[15]

A feeling of being discarded like garbage wells up from deep inside the protagonist. With the key lost, *he* finds himself locked out by an invisible barrier that prevents him from entering his private space. The disappearance of this private

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[15] Gao, Soul Mountain, 394.

space, which is needed for the recovery of one's scattered selves, destroys the balance between the outer world and one's inner life. A distance between the two realms constructs a converting stage through which people are able to mediate between their inner subjectivities and social identities. However, people might keep ignoring this converting distance by misplacing the key while remaining attracted by the grotesques of the outer world due to the fear of loneliness. As an image revealing the vulnerability of the distance, the key acts as a subtle literary metaphor of the dilemma within which, in order to survive through the omnipresent loneliness, people keep looking for a shelter while simultaneously losing it.

It is one of the major subjects in the novel *One Man's Bible* that one's inner space is broken down by the outer world at a time when the cult of an individual instigates collective hysteria while banning individual voices. On the one hand, being separated from the public, as is shown in the novel, becomes the greatest fear of people during the Cultural Revolution. To be acknowledged by the public, which is especially typified by the working class within a highly classified society, becomes an overwhelmingly realistic concern of individuals. *Laoliu* (老劉), who commits suicide by jumping off a building in chapter 36, illustrates the plight of a large number of victims who died of loneliness after being expelled from the public realm during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, during a time when all the economic materials and social resources are under the control of a political authority, even loneliness becomes a luxury. To escape from the center of political turmoil, *he* applies to be sent to the farm land of *wuqi ganxiao* (五七幹校, May Seventh Cadre School)[16] and goes on to exile himself to another remote area of the countryside. Wherever he goes, *he* finds himself being monitored by local cadres. It is under the wing of *Lu shuji* (陸書記, Chief Lu), who is sent to the countryside as a degraded cadre, that *he* is able to survive the remaining years of the Cultural Revolution. From escaping loneliness to approaching it, the protagonist is converting to "one man's Bible," which urges the individual to retreat into his inner world that houses the

[16] May Seventh Cadre School was named after Mao's May Seventh Directive in 1968 that urged the rightists to be sent to the countryside to achieve the re-education of socialism. The cadre school is actually a system of labour camp the purpose of which was to put intellectuals in guardian.

spiritual supremacy for people to conform with. As a necessary pathway leading to the primacy of one's inner life, loneliness embodies such fundamental traits of a supreme being as alienation, transcendency and spontaneity.

In Gao's works, some characters desire to be secluded from human society in order to preserve the spontaneity of their lives in stereotyped surroundings. The socialized identities these characters exhibit in public life are normally contrary to the personalities that are synchronized with their inner nature. In Gao's short story *Haishang* (海上, At Sea) (1983), a newly arrived clerk, *he,* behaves so self-absorbed and unsociable in the office that no one pays any attention to his existence. On a collective trip to the seaside, the protagonist of *I,* an active staff member who is entrusted with taking care of the seniors during the journey, gets a chance to revaluate the real being of *he* under the surface of his loneliness. Fleeing the chores of mixing with the boring seniors, *I* goes swimming offshore to relax. When he comes across his solitary companion in a floating boat, *I* is attracted by the vigorous appearance of *he* who keeps roaring at the sea like an unrestrained beast. Influenced by an atmosphere full of primordial vitality, *I* too starts shouting at the sea with an appreciation of the transcendent insanity that accompanies the unspoilt inner nature of human beings.[17] The story reflects contradictory human situations within a crowded trivial surrounding, which consists of the social suppression that functions as a major cause of the distortion of human nature in Gao's works. With an artificial dedication to social affairs, *I* seems to enjoy his sense of superiority in front of *he* who, on the contrary, is improperly retreating from the public sphere. Once the surroundings undergo a dramatic change, as from the working space to the sea in the story, the two characters' situations are reversed, with *I* being subdued by the unaffected humanity once hidden behind the solitary indifference of *he*.

5. Purgatory: the Awe and Veneration of Generations

From the titles of Gao's novels, *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*, it may

[17] Gao, "Haishang 海上 (At Sea)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 121-29.

be discerned that the writer is ambitious to dredge up an individual's discovery of the self that is kept away from the hypocrisy and turmoil of both the secular and religious world. What shapes human selves, according to William Mathews, seems to be "the temporal structure of human processes" that "cannot be captured at all in a chronicle of events" but is "fundamentally narrative."[18] By drawing an analogy of "steppingstones" to the temporal moments in life, Mathews also suggests that "a person crossing a river by means of a series of steppingstones can look back and in them identify the set of steps which have brought him to his present position."[19] It is based on the temporality as well as causality of events that people develop a linear conception about the past, present and future while taking purgatory as a basic means to approach the unity of their lives and selves. In a traditional civilian society, the demand for purgatory has been executed in the realm of a developed pantheism, within which the awe and veneration toward various Ghosts and Gods serve as a semi-religious source linking people's religious complex with the secular events in real life. In a more ordered historical period, this sort of pantheism might have characterized the civilian culture with all the traits that are needed for people to become spiritually harmonized with all kinds of unknowing. While in the violent depression caused by a heterogeneous ideological authority, as it is shown in Gao's novels, the naturalistic pantheism is being replaced by the atheism prescribed by a political hypothesis as well as by the following cult of a supreme figure such as Mao during the Cultural Revolution. The decline of pantheism in the shadow of the rising doctrine of class struggle induces a widespread ignorance of the demand of purgatory in a secular society that is adhered to by several characters within Gao's novels.

Soul Mountain presents a kaleidoscopic picture of civilian society existing along the upper and middle reaches of the *Changjiang* (長江, Yangtze River) in southwestern China. The spirit of the local culture, as conveyed in the novel, mainly rests on a variety of sacrificial rituals accompanied by elegiac ballads. The form and

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[18] William Mathews, "Interpreting Lives: Some Hermeneutical Problems in Autobiography and Biography," Irish Philosophical Journal 3 (1986): 32.
[19] Ibid., 30.

content of local sacrificial rituals have barely been influenced by the orthodoxy of Confucianism that weighs *renlun* (人倫, human relations) more than *guishen* (鬼神, ghosts and gods). The elegiac ballads performed during the rituals serve to show people's respect for the ghosts and gods as well as to cast out evil spirits, so that the fortunes of both the living and the dead would be blessed and protected. The semi-religious pantheistic belief in a variety of ghosts and gods, by virtue of which the local people are able to link the two kingdoms of *yin* (陰, nether world) and *yang* (陽, this world), meets people's demand of purgatory before the advent of their afterlives. Yet, under the obligation of atheism underpinned by a new political power, the semi-religious *wushu* (巫術, shamanism) has been banned from the public sphere as a superstitious activity. It is within a context lacking free approaches to one's inner being, e.g. one's latent need for purgatory, that the protagonist in *Soul Mountain* journeys to the south trying to rediscover people's awe and veneration toward ghosts and gods, and the protagonist in *One Man's Bible* comes to re-evaluate the eligibility of the cult of the individual as the supreme.

The old sorcerer, appearing in chapter 41 of *Soul Mountain*, who is the village's last witchcraft master, keeps reminiscing about his glorious past. In his golden age he used to take the leading role in offering sacrifices to ancestors, dominating people, sacrificial animals and other materials needed for the rituals. As he grows older, the villagers start to become increasingly indifferent, showing little care or interest in offering sacrifices to either gods or their ancestors. On a New Year's Eve, just before he dies, the old master goes down to the riverside to conduct his last sacrifice and perform elegiac ballads with his aged voice, trying to warn the villagers of the curses that will follow the neglect of their ancestors. In a childish manner, the old master is mourning over his fellow villagers' blasphemy and the indifference shown to ghosts and gods, as well as the disappearance of expertise in his lifetime. The other old singer from chapter 49 finds the performance of ballads rudely disrupted by his oldest son, a party cadre, and with this the inheritance of the witchcraft performances vanishes within the family, whose lineage had ever determined the success of the family business. Facing rampant intrusion from an

atheistic ideology, the bond among family members that was overemphasized in a civilian culture starts perishing, and there follows a replay of the widespread family fighting during the Cultural Revolution.

A copy of the beginning part of *Hei'an zhuan* (黑暗傳, Record of Darkness), in Chapter 59 of *Soul Mountain*, gives an example of the supposedly unique folk epic of the *Han* (漢) race in history. Evolving from the elegiac ballads performed during local funerals to redeem the scattered spirits of the dead, the body of *Hei'an zhuan*, which was lost, is so huge that it is supposed to be performed throughout three consecutive days and nights. From the partial manuscript of the folk ballads, the protagonist of *I* is able to anticipate a great narrative work about the local history, nature and human spirits subdued in the whole text. Having even survived the domination of the orthodox culture of *zhongyuan* (中原, central plains) for thousands of years, the local epic is tragically lost in a modern era:

> "But this is just the prelude. What about *the Record of Darkness*?" I have been pacing about the room but I stop to ask him this.
>
> He says this is the filial song they used to sing in early times at mountain funerals before the interment of the coffin. It was sung on the song ground in front of the spirit hall for up to three days and three nights, however it can't be sung frivolously and when it is sung all other songs must be suppressed. He had only taken down a small part when the master singer suddenly fell ill and died.
>
> "Why didn't you write it down at the time?" I say looking at him.
>
> "At the time the old man was ill and sat with his bedding wrapped around him in a small wooden chair," he explains. It is as if he is to blame and he resumes his timid appearance.
>
> "Isn't there anyone else in the mountain who knows how to sing it?"
>
> "Some can sing the prelude but no-one can sing all of it."
>
> He says he knew an old master singer who had a brass chest full of song books, amongst which was a complete set of *the Record of Darkness*. At the time they were confiscating old books and *the Record of Darkness* had been targeted in the search for reactionary and superstitious works. The old man buried the brass chest. A few months later he dug out the chest and found the books had gone mouldy so he spread them out in the courtyard to dry. He was seen and reported. The head of the forest district had the public security officials come and the old man was forced to hand over the whole set. It wasn't long afterwards that he died.[20]

All the records of the local sacrificial ballads suddenly disappear without

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[20] Gao, Soul Mountain, 360-61.

forthcoming inheritors, as assumes a fiercely hysterical age when the local tradition of pursuing purgatory through religious performances is eliminated as superstition remains. The cultural standstill following the break up of humans and gods is deeply rooted in a forced ideological switch from the age-old quest for spiritual complacency to the chase after secular profits due to various realistic dangers.

In the novel *One Man's Bible*, Gao tries to trace a young man's history in a series of radical social movements, within which an individual's spiritual pursuit is shattered and replaced by the cult of a supreme individual. Within a policed political utopia, not only the public domain but also the individual space is under the inspection of an ideological authority. Instead of a spontaneous normalcy of human consciousness, a lasting fear of realistic perils takes control of every aspect of one's being. With such an imminent fear, moreover, people no longer care about proper behaviour in this life that, according to the half-religious belief in retribution, affect one's fate afterwards. Likewise, the veneration of ghosts and gods, which was once popular within a civilian society, is doomed to perish in the face of the obedience of human spirits to a secular supremacy. In the shadow of the cult of the individual, in chapter 35, people are getting used to carrying out *Zaoqingshi* (早請示, seeking instructions in the morning) and *Wanhuibao* (晚彙報, reporting at night) facing the portrait of the commander-in-chief.[21] Instead of the elegiac ballads performed during sacrificial rituals in *Soul Mountain*, in *One Man's Bible* a daily-conducted worship at the shrine of a living dictator during political rituals turns into a new form of purgatory, by which people try showing their absolute loyalty to the deified command-in-chief as well as their commitment to self-purging under an overarching principle. Nevertheless, during the Cultural Revolution, the personal tragedy of the protagonist, who gradually perceives the inhumanity and absurdity of such a purgatory, makes him turn against all the ideological fantasies. In a fictional conversation with the commander-in-chief in his bathrobe, *he* declares that an individual cannot be deprived of his spiritual needs and dignity by any person or power. Without going back to the veneration of ghosts and gods that is a strong

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[21] Gao, One Man's Bible, 274.

focus in *Soul Mountain*, the protagonist in *One Man's Bible* converts to a liberalist who believes in nothing but his own understanding about the world.

Recollection about childhood is often adopted in Gao's works to indicate reminiscences about a lost world that was charming and peaceful. Within these memories, the family members, who usually would die tragically, keep arousing people's longing to purge themselves of unfilial deeds they've done when young. In the short story *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* (給我老爺買魚竿, Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandpa) (1986), the protagonist of *I* buys an expensive imported fishing rod for his grandfather to compensate for the one he accidentally broke as a child.[22] Since his grandfather has already passed away, *I* comes up with the idea of fulfilling his purgatory willingly by delivering the fishing rod to his hometown where he lived as a child with his grandfather. Lost within a throng of dormitory buildings, *I* is stunned by the fact that the lake where grandfather used to fish has been filled in for roads, the river outside the town is dried out because of a newly-erected dam, and the woods on the hills where grandfather used to hunt have all been felled. What the grandfather was seeking through fishing and hunting is some sort of terrestrial fun from nature. Even this kind of entertaining space is withering away due to the ongoing civil projects. The woods-like television antennas standing on the building roofs and the repeatedly inserted commentaries about a soccer match are taken as the metaphor of the decline of natural appeal and living space. Putting the protagonist's unfruitful wish for purgatory within such a background of rapid deterioration of environments, the author seems to be trying to highlight the failure of one's spiritual pursuit in a surrounding where the harmonious living order has been replaced by materialistic chaos.

6. Identity Puzzles: the Conflicts between Social Status and Personality

When Gao refuses to be labelled by any sign, either literary or ideological, it

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[22] Gao, "Gei wo laoye mai yugan 給我老爺買魚竿 (Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandpa)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chuban she, 2001), 291-310.

seems that he is consciously rejecting any suspicious identity that benefits nothing but to ignore one's complicated being. This partly explains why in Gao's works a large number of characters are identified by pronouns, not even by their artificial names. It must be more unacceptable for Gao to ascribe one's identity to his/her social status, as is the basis of *chusheng* (出身, class origin) and *xuetong* (血統, blood lineage) dominating the nation for decades. What Gao is dedicated to represent in his works is how complicated human identity can be, whether in its numerical or qualitative term,[23] as well as how human identity is withered and distorted in a Utopia, where one's social status rises above other human qualities.

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, the protagonist of *I* serves as an official member in *zuoxie* (作協, The Writers' Association). Hanging around in the literary circle in Beijing, *I* is getting tired of the rigidity and dreariness of the association, which partly functions as a propaganda agency monitored by the Party. Nevertheless, during his trip to the south, *I* realizes that his identity as a member of the association might bring him into special situations he would not otherwise experience. The membership card, indicating that he is a writer from Beijing, appears to be a confidential document to the local cadres who treat *I* as a propagandist cadre with a higher rank than them. Due to the local cadres' wariness of such a mysterious script from Beijing, now and then the journey can become either smoothed or obstructed by the protagonist's identity as a senior writer.

Escaping from the threat of death as well as depressions within a spiritually stifling surrounding, the protagonist is in search of an identity for his whole existence. On the trip, the protagonist's normally disguised personality fuelled by his entangled inner subjectivities bursts out so furiously that the writer has to adopt different pronouns to house the different traits within the personality. In most cases the social status of the protagonist as a chartered writer from Beijing just serves as an eccentric appendent to his real being. Yet still *I* has to create a balance between his social status and his genuine personality, since often he seems in the reminiscence of the terrestrial warmth only his social status can offer. As long as the

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[23] Paul Ricoeur, "Personal Identity and Narrative Identity," in Oneself As Another, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 116.

terrestrial warmth cannot be cast out of his mind, the protagonist seems unable to successfully extricate himself from the identity puzzles that trouble him. And the forthcoming conflicts between one's socialized qualities and inner subjectivities form an ultimate paradox of human existence.

The social circumstance represented in *Soul Mountain* is a place where even a subtle balance between heterogeneous human traits cannot be maintained. No matter how far the location of the protagonist goes, an unexpected interference of social status over human instincts might follow. In chapter 49, *I* gets to know an old folk-song singer in a remote small town, who is an expert in performing the rituals and lyrics of Taoist ceremonies. In order to take a look at the declining religious performance, *I* follows the old singer into a mountain village where he lives. Fully equipped with luxurious uniforms and instruments, the old singer starts performing the traditional lyrics passed on by family members for generations. But the performance is interrupted by the sudden appearance of the old singer's oldest son, the chief executive of the village. The young man insists that the religious activity is superstitious and not supposed to be displayed in front of the villagers as well as such a stranger like *I*. Facing such a young man who is both a cadre at the very bottom of the political system and the offspring of the old singer, *I* gets lost in an absurd situation while realizing that the ideological restrictions have already spread into the smallest unit of a society.

In the shadow of secular profits that are distributed according to one's social status, it becomes extremely difficult for people to bring their complicated human traits into harmony, since the overarching will to survive the secular world keeps urging one's identity into conformity with his social status. During an era when all sorts of social resources are under the supervision of a highly centralized social system, people have no space to exile themselves physically or spiritually in order to escape social suppression. This explains why an individual yearning for a spontaneous being, such as Gao, keeps fleeing the here and now with an acknowledgement of the destiny of literature as in exile.

The Cultural Revolution, as depicted in *One Man's Bible*, stirs up an

outrageous atmosphere within which the conflict between one's social status and personality takes on an extreme form. As a common office staff member struggling in the surges of political campaigns, the protagonist of *he* gets involved in the group fighting between different factions in order to survive political persecution. During a period when an absolute loyalty to the supreme authority is urged, people are becoming used to subduing the authenticity of their being. Nevertheless, under the superficial tameness, nevertheless, human instincts break through political suppressions and wreak havoc in a distorted manner. To achieve and preserve a legal identity that is prescribed according to one's social status, people go against and even trade on their intrinsic being. In this sense, the identity puzzles actually imply the loss of people's selfhood, since "the secret of selfhood is commonly seen to lie in authenticity and individuality."[24] Getting tired of the group fighting within the dreadful political climate, *he* makes up his mind to leave the city for the rural area, which has offered shelters for recluses throughout the history. Finding himself being monitored by the head of the village school, where he finally settles down to teach, *he* soon realizes that he actually has nowhere to rest his soul since the ideological fury has spread into every corner of the society. Due to his weak social status, *he* has no choice but to keep exiling from one place to another in order to escape from the interference of political inspections. It seems that the protagonist is dedicated to putting himself into another exile when he is leaving the nation for good. This also marks the division by which the pronouns of *you* and *he* are alternately applied to indicate the protagonist's different identities. Different from the secular warmth created by the protagonist's artificial identity in *Soul Mountain*, the piercing reality of classifying people into different groups by their social status in *One Man's Bible* causes the protagonist to reject the Utopia. Once out of the Utopia, instead of the dominance of social status, a shattered personality fuelled by the once abused inner subjectivities comes to interfere with the protagonist's request for an ultimate personal identity.

The traces of distorted human spirits within a highly classified society can be

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[24] Roy Porter, ed., Rewriting the Self, Histories from the Renaissance to the Present, (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

spotted almost everywhere in Gao's writings. In contrast with those figures whose lives are full of collisions and struggles, the cadres in positions represented in Gao's works are normally sneaky and apathetic. *Lushang* (路上, On the Road) (1982), one of Gao's short stories, is about such a cadre who freezes to death under his luxurious furry coat that symbolizes the superiority of his social status.[25] The story is an allegory about the contest between a distorted spirit and an intact human mind when facing the harshness of nature. On the road, the cadre from Beijing, always with his head drawn into a furry coat and with a lit high-quality cigarette between his lips, is fully ignorant of the danger ahead. In the car accident that follows, the cadre's willpower to survive, compared to his arrogant attitude earlier, seems so weak that he breaks down completely when told they have to abandon the car in the snow to seek survival. With the cadre's death as the outcome of withering humanity, the story acknowledges the vitality of spontaneous beings with images like *jingfan* (經幡, ritual flag) in the wind, green plants outside the maintenance station, experienced Tibetan workers and snorting horses. Besides, the colloquial expression of Beijing dialect imported as a mild reaction against the normal written language seems meant to serve as a satire of the arrogant and coward authorities.

7. The Imperceptible: To Speak Where It Is Unspeakable

Has literature examined all the possible aspects of being human? Is literature able to convey every tingling sense within human mind? If the answers are affirmative, literature would lose its most profound nature, that is to speak where it is unspeakable. People still need stories because, as J. Hillis Miller argues, "what cannot be expressed logically, one is tempted to say, we then tell stories about."[26] Human properties are so complicated that myriad variants may develop from the solid and general concept of what it is to be human. One of the contributions made by great literary works is to perceive the imperceptible as well as to trace the

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[25] Gao, "Lushang 路上 (On the Road)," In Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 85-97.

[26] J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in Critical Terms for Literary Studies, ed. Frank Lentricchia, and Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 74.

untraceable in the territory of human nature. Given that "cold literature does bear an unchangeable subject that is the untraceable human selves,"[27] Gao's pursuit of literary creation meets this ideal of literature.

In order to represent an imperceptible and untraceable inner being, Gao imports metaphorical or sometimes symbolistic images and ideas that are correspondingly perceptible and traceable. Thus the various subtle scenes underlying the surface of human existence are able to be vivified. By this kind of representative endeavour, Gao develops the metaphorical structure of the pilgrimage in the novel *Soul Mountain*, as well as many impressive images that are intended to interpret the subtlety of human inner life.

The image of Soul Mountain, which is the destination of the protagonist's journey in *Soul Mountain*, is a compound comprising of the untraceable "soul" and the traceable "mountain." Whereas the fragmentary and incomplete information about the mountain indicates its fabrication of nonsense in the reality, the image of the mountain truly helps establish a solid spiritual destiny that represents people's yearning for salvation and the immortality of their souls. With its mysterious atmosphere permeating the whole journey, Soul Mountain as a divine place typifies the spiritual ultimate people hope to approach. While its untraceable location is combined with the concept of *bi'an* (彼岸, the other shore) in chapter 76, Soul Mountain is tinged with the teachings of Zen Buddhism that encourage people to transcend the chaos on this shore. At this point, the problem of whether Soul Mountain is approachable or not continues as a metaphysical puzzle throughout the protagonist's journey. By this metaphorical structure of a pilgrimage to Soul Mountain, Gao seems to be trying to visualize, or to conceptualize, his understanding of an individual's quest for a supreme sensuality about human existence.

Among other metaphorical images that represent imperceptible and untraceable traits of human existence in *Soul Mountain*, the bestial mask in chapter 24 uncovers the primitive beastliness deeply hidden in one's inner world. The

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[27] Gao, "Bali suibi 巴黎隨筆 (Jottings from Paris)," In Meiyou zhuyi, (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 2000), 23.

brutish aspect of human nature seems to serve as a mysterious yet substantial quality that helps constitute one's identity. It is always risky for artists to represent the dark side within human nature in a direct way, not only because of the imperceptibility of particular spiritual deeds, but also because of the weakness of the human psyche when facing the bare truth. While attributing the self to self-presentation and self-disclosure, Robert C. Solomon also points out an equally important tendency of self-deception, that is "to disguise or to hide those facets of the self that are less than flattering, humiliating, or simply irrelevant to the social context or interpersonal project at hand."[28] It is in this sense that serious literature can be expected to be the one that is dedicated to remove self-deception from human soul with great courage and wisdom. Furthermore, a highly mature writer is supposed to bear the burden of representing the dark issues of human reality with a compassionate and respectful manner, no matter he is working on comedies, tragedies or ironies. Gao transfers the imperceptible beastliness of human beings into a visible bestial mask that, as a sheer appearance, reverses the normal layers of human spirituality, if there is any. It is this bestial mask that helps visualize the untraceable and always hidden aspect of the human soul:

> It is a carved wooden mask of an animal head with a human face, two horns protrude from the top of the head and alongside these are a pair of smaller, sharp horns, so it cannot represent a domestic cow or goat. It would have to be some wild animal, the demonic aura of the face definitely doesn't have a deer-like docility and the places for docile deer's eyes have no eyeballs and instead are two round gaping holes, eye sockets jutting out. Beneath the brow bone is a deep furrow, the forehead is pointed, and incisions radiating upwards from the center of the forehead and the brow bone make the eye sockets even more prominent. It is thus that the eyes terrify the enemy, which is precisely how it is when beast and man confront each other.
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> . . . . . .
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> The sides of the nostrils, the corners of the mouth, the upper and lower lips, the cheekbones, the forehead and the middle of the forehead indicate that the carver had a sound knowledge of the human head. Looking at it closely again, it is only the eye sockets and pointed forehead that are exaggerated, the thrust of the carving of the flesh gives it a sort of tenseness. Without the tiger whiskers, it is a replica of the face of primitive man with markings on it. Their understanding

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[28] Robert C. Solomon, "Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy," in Self and Deception: A Cross-Cultural Philosophical Enquiry, ed. Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 103.

> of nature and the self is fully encompassed in the round black holes of the eye sockets. The two holes at the corners of the mouth reveal nature's scorn for man and show man's fear of nature. The face also accurately expresses the animal nature in human beings and the fear of this animal nature within themselves.
>
> Man cannot cast off this mask, it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit. He can no longer remove from his own face this mask which has already grown like skin and flesh so he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself, but this is in fact himself. He cannot remove this mask, and this agony. But having manifested itself as his mask, it cannot be obliterated, because the mask is a replica of himself. It has no will of its own, or one could say it has a will but no means of expression and so prefers not to have a will. Therefore it has left man with an eternal face with which he can examine himself in amazement.[29]

As a matter of fact, the pronoun of *you* can also be seen as an outward mask that implies the innermost being hidden within the character of *I*. When *I* travels in a realistic world, the protagonist of *you*, functioning as a projection of the soul of *I*, travels in a spiritual world. As a partial constituent of the same personality, *you* seems more humane than *I*, since *you* responds to the world without any artificial concealment. At this point, it is the existence of *you* in *Soul Mountain* that makes the usually well-disguised human instincts perceptible and recordable.

An overall impression, that the exact motivation of human behaviours seems obscure and unreliable, can easily be achieved in Gao's works. What partially dominates Gao's literary stance is an everlasting concern for the chaotic inner being that keeps intervening in the everyday reality of human existence. Meanwhile Gao's writings undertake an inspection of the outrageous intrusions of outer forces that are used to ignore the nature of human inner being. Driven by extreme dogmas that repel the tolerance and compassion normally shown within artistic representation toward the reality of human existence, outer forces such as political interrogation and religious oppression are dedicated to building a utopia outside as well as inside human psyche. Instigated by the fiercely political fantasy as shown in the novel *One Man's Bible*, a social campaign that carries out a compulsive transformation of people's thoughts seems attractive to those who feel guilty about their spiritual deeds. This kind of inexplicable need for spiritual purification, which was popular during the Cultural Revolution, reminds the protagonist of *junzi guo* (君子國, the kingdom

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[29] Gao, Soul Mountain, 140-41.

of pure people) in a fairy tale, where people are engaged in self-censorship to make sure their hearts look pure and clean through the chest mirrors.[30] In spite of the great allure of spiritual purity, the kingdom of pure people looks suspicious to the protagonist, since he is fully self-sustained with the inherent impurity of his inner being. It is based upon an acknowledgement of the irrepressibility as well as the imperceptibility of one's spiritual dynamic that the writer develops in the novel a grotesque picture of the protagonist's inner being, which is full of scattered consciousness and untrammelled desires. In contrast with the chest mirrors that compel people to carry out self-censorship, a spontaneous disclosure made by the protagonist about his mental events tries to bring the "flesh-and-blood heart" into a humane inspection, a posture challenging the censoring system of the society. When facing the shadow of *Mao*, in chapter 53, the protagonist of *he* finally declares the supremacy of an individual's spiritual autonomy, rejecting the intrusions from any ideological authorities for the sake of collective wills or benefits.[31] The novel's title, *One Man's Bible,* subtly reveals an individual's consistent resistance to the collective fanaticism that tends to completely ignore and eliminate his own spirituality.

A few of Gao's short stories are of inter-textual details that have been developed later into the plots in his novels, e.g. *Fang Shuji* (方書記, Chief Fang) in the story *He nabian* (河那邊, Across the River) (1983) foreshadowing *Lu Shuji* (陸書記, Chief Lu) in the novel *One Man's Bible*.[32] Different from that in the novel the protagonist is obsessed with his own mental experiences, in the story *Across the River* the protagonist of *I* is more of a bystander trying to catch the imperceptible scenes within another person's inner being. As a former high official who lives in seclusion to escape earthly struggles, *Fang* apparently transcends obsessions with death, loneliness, fear and other secular vanities. Withdrawing from the society, *Fang* is yearning for a spiritual freedom that can only be sustained by the nature of the mountains where he is living. What is imperceptible for the protagonist of *I*

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[30] Gao, One Man's Bible, 123.
[31] Ibid., 406-8.
[32] Gao, "He nabian 河那邊 (Across the River)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 219-54.

about *Fang* is the indistinct sadness behind his serenity. It is through an imaginative hunting scene provoked by *Fang*'s mesmerizing description that the protagonist's perception of his underlying sadness is vivified: the sad eyes, wet nose and drum-sounding hoofbeats of the deer within an impasse reveals in front of *Fang* a hopeless world full of endless chase and hunt. In this story the writer seems strategically to be leaving the character of *Fang* at an unapproachable position that is indicated by the river, which is a symbol separating the terrestrial and spiritual world. Although *I* is trying to geographically as well as spiritually reach his reclusive life saviour, *Fang*'s spirituality remains an imperceptible poetic world for such a regular being as *I,* who has to return across the river to his earthly world before the dusk.

Chapter Four

Alienated Binaries: the Mirror-stage of Self Recognition

What Is Fragmented, Self or Mirror?

In one of his papers delivered in 1949, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) argues that it is during the "mirror-stage" that man develops an alienating identification with the totality of his being that is actually amended from his "fragmented body."[1] In Gao's concept of Cold Literature, his writing disintegrates the totality of each character into various inner subjectivities, the "fragmented body," and deploys alienating perspectives, the "mirror-image," to reflect multi-faceted identities.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), one of Gao's favourite dramatists, was renowned for his conception of "epic theatre," within which the "alienation effect (A-effect)" is largely applied to help the spectator gain a detached and critical view of the stage scenes.[2] The alienation effect, according to Brecht, refers to a representation that "allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar." With a "detached eye," the spectator is able to "transform himself from general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry."[3] Given that it actually operates in the tension of "difference and resemblance" which, argues Tzvetan Todorov, helps constitute narrative,[4] alienation in its literary sense can be seen as a particular form of metaphor, "the same-but-different," which acts as the motor of narrative transformation.[5]

Either in *Soul Mountain* or *One Man's Bible*, the frequent shift of pronouns as protagonists and the mixture of time and space can be considered as the rhetorical devices adopted to meet the writer's attempt to detach daily life from its normalcy. Yet most of all, as a series of metaphorical "mirror-images" evoked by Gao's

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[1] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," in Écrits, trans. Bruce Fink, et al, (New York: Norton, 2002), 75-81.
[2] Bertolt Brecht, "The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties," in Brecht on Theatre, the Development of an Aesthetic, trans. John Willett, (London: Shenval Press, 1964), 22-23.
[3] Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in Brecht on Theatre, 192.
[4] Tzvetan Todorov, "Narrative Transformations," in The Poetics of Prose, 233.
[5] Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," in Literature and Psychoanalysis, the Question of Reading - Otherwise, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 280-81.

narrative principle of alienated perception/contemplation (冷眼靜觀), such alienated binaries as the female, nature, religion, the nether world, cultural otherness, spiritual otherness and the uncanny help people recognize the corresponding subjects, mainly one's inner subjectivities, in unfamiliar contexts.

1. The Female: the Helpless Lambs within a Masculine World

In Gao's works, the female is frequently exhibited as an alienation from the violence of a masculine, highly disciplined world. In contrast with the male representing aggression and power, the female represents peace and beauty that are indifferent to the reality. The mysterious chastity of the female keeps arousing man's lust leading to pains and hardship. At the same time, the female appears to be a myth to the male since they can never be completely approached. The only exception to the female as an alienation is that the female too can be soul twisted after experiencing the chaos created by political movements.

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, most of the female figures are anonymously called *she* so that they can share a common quality of female being, which seems a complex of beauty and temptation. These lonely female figures are usually self-inhibited as well as longing for a meaningful intimacy with their male partner. Yet it appears that they can do no more than feed the cynical protagonist's lust for a woman's body, as is evident when *I* announces in chapter 39 "my relationships with women changed long ago and lost this instinctive youthful love . . . only lust remains."[6] The affair between *you* and *she*, who was met by the protagonist at the very beginning of the trip, could last longer just because *you* is in need of a female whose company can help remove his feeling of loneliness as well as the distorted carnality. Finally, *she* is forsaken after a fierce fight that ensues when she asks for a more stable relationship that *he* is unwilling to seek. With more female figures involved in his love affairs, the protagonist's lust for women swells to an abnormal level. When a group of young females cluster around *you* spreading out their palms

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[6] Gao, Soul Mountain, 229.

for fortune telling, *you* is totally intoxicated by the feminine atmosphere murmuring that he loves and yearns for every one of their hands. As the female figure who, in a rare case, happens to own a name, *Zhuhuapo* (朱花婆) comes to embody the typical character the writer would attribute to the female. On the one hand, *Zhuhuapo* keeps flirting with men through her attractive feminine beauty; on the other, she repels men warning that sins bring retribution. When *I* catches sight of two different trees in *Wuyi* Mountains, the dramatized narrator puts the combination of feminine beauty and innate evil in this way:

> On Huanggang Mountain, which is the main mountain of the Wuyi Range, I manage to photograph a splendid deciduous pine . . . .
>
> Nature creates, in this mystical way, not only powerful vitality such as this but also exquisite, ever-changing feminine beauty. It also creates evil. It is also in the Wuyi Mountains, on the south side of the mountain reserve, that I see a huge decaying torreya. . . . Its decaying black branches wilfully outstretched like a malevolent demon. This photo I do develop and print and whenever I look at it, it chills my heart and I can't look at it for long. I realize that it brings to the surface the dark aspect in the depths of my soul, which terrifies even me. I can only recoil when confronted by beauty or evil.[7]

Since it is the complexity of female beauty that stirs up ferments within a masculine world, the female has suffered a lot from the violence committed by men and society. In those stories *you* keeps telling to seduce *she*, females are always the victims of erotic conspiracies and bloody crimes carried out by a masculine world during the turbulent periods, such like that female students from the cities are raped by local cadres or villains and commit suicide by drowning themselves in rivers. In chapter 66, when in a fantasy *you* wades into the river of *Minghe* (冥河, the nether river), he comes across in the water those drowned females with pale faces and heavy sighs. Among all the dead females, *Zhuhuapo* is the one who gets revived and changes her appearances from time to time to take revenge on evil men.

The only exception to the female typified as the temptation and therefore the sacrifice to men's lusts is in the story about a mendicant nun who comes to help a Grand Marshall out of the invisible peril ahead of him. What is embedded in the story, which is said to be adapted from the literati jottings during the time of *Jin* (晉,

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[7] Gao, Soul Mountian, 413.

265-420), is not the subject of temptation but of redemption. It can be seen as a ritual of purification and self-salvation when the nun cuts her belly to rinse the intestines at noon every day. The tension between the female and the masculine world throughout the novel is eased at this moment when the female character performs a daily dissection of herself in order to gain a clear insight into both her soul and forthcoming fortunes.

Different from the mystification of female characters in *Soul Mountain*, in which the reality is fully mixed with mysteries and fantasies, the female figures in *One Man's Bible* seem realistic and tangible. *Margarethe* (馬格麗特), a Jewish actress who develops a fruitless love affair with *you* in *One Man's Bible*, is differentiated from the females in *Soul Mountain* who without exception bear the same domestic background. Yet it is *Margarethe*'s persistent immersion of herself in the depressing periods of oppression and injustice in Jewish history that conflicts with the protagonist's resolve to depart from history as a posture of questing for the perfect freedom. Not at all does the similarity of unfortunate experiences and memories bring the two to a consensus on their lifestyles. *You* acts as a hobo who lives on the principles of bumming around for instant happiness, while *Margarethe* as a sentimental female is yearning for a lasting and protected joy from him. The conflict between *Margarethe* and the protagonist lasts throughout their stories, even though both are eager to step out of gloomy reflections on historical injustice. After the break-up with *Margarethe*, *you* comes to reconsider his personal history and starts writing a book while continuing to curse what he is engaged in during the writing process. Hence by his recall more female figures emerge from the past that *you* exerts himself to forget, and meanwhile, a dispirited and cowardly *he*, as the past version of *you*, crawls onto the stage to confess himself to the merciful *you*. While seeking the consolation of female tenderness from *Lin* (林), *Xiaoxiao* (蕭蕭) and *Xu Ying* (許英), the protagonist of *he* witnesses how the evils within human beings generate disasters in fanatical and benighted surroundings, as well as how the beauty and virtues of the female are abused and destroyed.

In his novels, Gao has more space to elaborate on the intricate relationship

between man and woman than in his short stories. As delicate and depressed as those in the novels, the female characters in Gao's short stories are normally immersed in an enclosed sanctuary that is beyond man's conjecture. In the story *Yu, xue ji qita* (雨、雪及其他, Rain, Snow and Else) (1982), the male figure of *I* is so impressed by the two sisters' brilliant conversation that he hides himself without interrupting them.[8] It is raining when *I* within gloomy thoughts strolls in a park, where he runs into two sisters in a shed. Without noticing the presence of *I* who is resting behind the stocks, the two girls start chatting interminably on topics ranging from nature and beauty to friendship and love. The tenderness and naiveté of the female world unexpectedly fill a stranger's heart with the warmth he expects. Without appearances and names, the sisters are entirely represented by their enchanting voices that seem powerful enough to convey the sheer spirituality owned by females. Unlike in his novels where the females can cause obsessions and furies in a masculine world, what Gao tells about the female in this story only concerns beauty and purity.

2. Nature: An Alienated Existence to Acquire X*ingling* (性靈)

In Gao's fictional works, nature as the counterpart of human society, often carries the wisdom and laws of humanity that are ruined in a material world. The mythology about nature might function as an irony upon unscrupulous human activities that are undertaken against the natural laws. Fundamentally, nature is presented as an alienated existence to help reveal the essentials within human nature when the protagonists are experiencing identity crises in repressive surroundings. A surpassing truth that is supposed to conduct these essentials is *xingling* (性靈, natural sensuousness), a highly spontaneous form of human existence that stresses an authentic behavioural conformity with the natural being.

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, a trip into the primitive areas around the origin of *Yangtze* River causes the protagonist to witness the weakness of human nature in the

[8] Gao, "Yu, xue ji qita 雨、雪及其他 (Rain, Snow and Else)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 65-84.

face of the immense and solemn existence of nature. Compared to the peaceful and harmonious scenes in nature, human beings seem greedy and aggressive, operating devastating projects such as field occupation, forest cutting and dam construction. As one of the outcomes of those extreme years, people lost respect for nature since they had been told that everything, from farming ability to human nature itself, can be reformed by social movements. One of the stories that shows the ironic contrast between merciful nature and savage mankind concerns the rumours of *yeren* (野人, wild man) spread in the primitive reserve of *Shennongjia* (神農架, Devine Farmer Shelf). With more and more trees felled, incidents of people witnessing man-like wild creatures are reported in the lumbering area, stirring up local excitements about exotic mysteries. According to a local geological prospector, a friend of *I*, a wild man was caught and later identified as a former palaeontologist who had been living in the primitive forests for twenty years.[9] For decades Nature adopts and feeds such a fugitive from the human world, while the local people keep hunting wild man for odd purposes.[10] Here Gao provides an ironic case of an ordinary academician, scared by surges of political persecutions, hiding himself in the forests, transforming into a wild man and staying alive by harvesting wild crops in mountain fields to escape from the savagery occurring in human society. The contrast between Nature and human society exposes the savagery and cruelty of human nature that has been misinterpreted as more "civilized" than Nature.

Within a spiritual vacuum when a nation's connection with its history and culture is eliminated, a deformed sense of human existence reigns when people are stimulated to live a life without fear regarding the outcome of human activities. Instead of traditional beliefs in mutual support and restraint among natural beings, what people crave for generations is power over their surroundings that will enable them to realize their absurd desires. As shown in *Soul Mountain*, people are possessed by the need to seek fun and benefits from abusing both human beings and wild animals. In chapter 59, in the mountain homesteads *I* comes across a bear cub

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[9] Gao, Soul Mountain, 385-89.

[10] The stories about wild man in the novel of *Soul Mountain* seem adapted from the successive reports of wild man in the same primitive areas during the 1980s. Such an adaptation shows a highly delicate dramatization as well as metaphorization of social events in Gao's works.

wearing a rope collar, a wormholed piece of leopard skin and a stuffed golden monkey. During the night the villagers swarm to a mountain quad to watch an acrobatic performance during which a young actress twists her arms and legs in a distorted way. People seem extremely excited about the twisted human body that is neither beautiful nor natural. These scenes are arranged in a primitive reserve where the bare mountain top devastated by deforestation typifies the intrusion of human activities into Nature. As a result of ignorance about their surroundings, the local people do not appreciate any more the artistic creations of their ancestors about the interaction between human beings and Nature, and this is why the folk epic of *Hei'anzhuan* (黑暗傳, the Record of Darkness) was lost.

With an ideological supremacy dominating all aspects of social life, such elements as Nature and human individuality are beyond public as well as individual concern. Within a society where everything is under the control of ideological administration, people lose the importance of spirituality that helps conduct human inner being. The journey of the protagonist in *Soul Mountain* is about seeking such a spiritual supremacy to replace the ideological supremacy. The natural being that has been ignored in the past becomes the primary concern in the journey, through which one's inner subjectivities are awakened and help remould the personality that has been depressed.

Haunted by people's astounding ignorance of Nature, the protagonist in *Soul Mountain* tries to confirm his identity as one part of a supreme natural existence. In his quest for a self that does not reflect the collective hysteria, but obeys the natural laws, the protagonist is introspective about his spiritual being from the perspective of Nature, a self-enclosed entity alienated from the social realm. It is from Nature and a few individuals who live as integral parts of Nature that *I* feels the harmony that comforts him. In the reserve of *Wolongshan* (臥龍山, Crouching Dragon Mountain), the old biologist, the ranger at an observation station and the guide who accompanies *I* into the mountain area all reminds *I* of creatures of *zizai* (自在, natural), and behave like spontaneous and unique beings. Thinking of himself as a creature of *ziwei* (自爲, unnatural), *I* realizes that he has to become a creature of

zizai before he is able to achieve the *xingling* (性靈, natural sensuousness) he has been seeking throughout his journey. At the end of the novel, when the protagonist as a narrator is talking about the *shanshui hua* (山水畫, landscape paintings) of *Gong Xian* (龔賢), he comes to understand that *xingling* always exists together with Nature, which leaves behind all the chaos of the secular world and remains in a transcendent atmosphere:

> Facing this snow scene scroll by Gong Xian what more can one say! There is such tranquillity one can almost hear the snow falling. It seems audible and yet is soundless.
>
> It is a dream scene.
>
> . . . . . .
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> Interesting brush-strokes can be acquired but sensuousness comes into existence together with life and also exists with mountains, rivers, plants and trees. The wonder of Gong Xian's landscapes lies in the brilliant flashes of sensuousness in his brush-work. To be boundless to the point of forgetting one's existence
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> . . . . . .
>
> However, Gong Xian didn't go mad; he transcended the world. Because he did not want to fight against the world he was able to preserve his innate nature.
>
> He did not want to pit rationality against being muddle-headed, he withdrew far away to a remote corner and immersed himself in a realm of pure dream.
>
> This was just another form of self-defence when he came to the realization that it was impossible to fight the world which had gone mad.
>
> He did not fight, he did not rationalize, and hence preserved the totality of his being.[11]

At this point, to pursue *xingling* is far beyond the issue of distance the protagonist is trying to keep from the realities of human life at the very beginning of his journey. In the case of *xingling*, distance can be everywhere as well as nowhere. Once a creature of *zizai* embraces nature as its spiritual supremacy, it achieves *xingling* that leads to harmony, not compromise, with an outer world.

In Gao's works the creatures closest to the commitment of *xingling* are usually females, from whom the protagonists attempt to achieve instinctive outpourings while stumbling in the hypocritical and suppressive surroundings. This kind of inclination toward unspoilt female temperaments, however, turns out to be wishful thinking when females are deformed and become artificial creatures in a

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[11] Gao, Soul Moutain, 444-46.

rugged reality. While sighing "You want a woman, . . ., a natural and totally wanton woman. . . . But where is such a woman to be found,"[12] in *One Man's Bible*, the protagonist of *you* is actually lamenting over the decline of human instincts in the shadow of overwhelming secularity. *Sylvie* (茜爾薇) in *One Man's Bible*, like the *Miao* girl in *Soul Mountain*, represents the female love that springs from the intact nature of a human being. *Sylvie*'s desire to visit a nonexistent primitive forest in the barren land of the Sydney area is a symbol of her instinctive quest for a primitive human existence, which is doomed to fail in the desert of terrestrial trivia. In contrast with her vitality when seeking the pleasures of human intimacy, *Sylvie* easily falls into depression when realizing the unsolvable conflict between one's instinctive pursuit of harmony and the chaotic human world.

As a spontaneous presentation of human instincts, *xingling* looks so heavenly within a rigidly disciplined society that the protagonists in both of Gao's novels are actually dedicated to fulfilling the personal task of reviving the naturalness of humanity. Yet in most of the cases, *xingling* as well as Nature seem to be alienated from real human scenes since humanity is easily being manipulated. Artificial beings, in contrast with spontaneous beings, are the major preoccupation of Gao's Cold Literature. In some of Gao's short stories, Nature is likewise adopted as an alienated existence to confront artificial beings. The protagonist of *he* in the story *Huahuan* (花環, Garland) (1983) is such an artificial being whose reminiscences about the countryside where he had grown up and later resided as a *zhiqing* (知青, school leaver) is to balance his feeling of success in the city life.[13] With *Xiaohui* (小慧), his pretty fiancé, as the trophy of his success, *he* is expecting admiration and compliments from his fellow villagers while on his homecoming trip. Even in front of *Xiaohui*, *he* is taking his life in the countryside as a subdued experience when artificially making up the names of wild flowers blossoming on the hillside. But once the garland he makes for *Xiaohui* reminds him of the one he made for little *Chunlan* (春蘭) as an artless child, the protagonist is awakened from complacency

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[12] Gao, One Man's Bible, 439.

[13] Gao, "Huahuan 花環 (Garland)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 109-19.

about his privileged status. In the end what truly seem worth glorifying to the protagonist are the wild flowers that are florescent every year without any artificial ornamentation. In comparison with the illusive blaze in the human world that destroys human instincts, "the breeze in the hills is merciful."

3. Religion: An Alienated World Pattern Opposite to Human Fantasy

As a playwright, Gao introduces into his plays elements of *chan* (禪, Zen), a branch of Buddhism that focuses on the practice of contemplation. By virtue of this semi-religious and metaphysical contemplation, Gao's plays contain transcendent human spirits as well as vigorous wits, which are conducted by *dunwu* (頓悟,sudden enlightenment) as the consequence of consistent dialectical meditation of Zen. For this reason, Gao's theatrical works are sometimes titled with *chan ju* (禪劇, Zen-style plays),[14] which seem more appropriate than titles from earlier times like *xianfeng xiju* (先鋒戲劇, pioneer theatricals) and *shiyan xiju* (實驗戲劇, experimental theatricals).

As for his novels and short stories, Gao likewise incorporates elements of Zen in his writings to enrich his literary representation. This feature is reflected in a large amount of witty jotting-like texts that are fragmentarily and randomly spread throughout his works. Other than an aesthetic application of Zen practice to his writings, religious elements from Taoism, Buddhism and even Christianity are also embraced as representative essentials to extract fundamental realities from the fantasies of humanity. Although it may not, like any other artistic mechanism, truly help reach a representative clarity, the involvement of religious elements does provide an alienated world pattern that is placed opposite to the unbelieving human being. In terms of their religious attitudes, all the protagonists in Gao's works are pagans. Nevertheless, they are all obsessed with a religious mood that is beyond solid religious beliefs. One of the obsessions that perplex them is how to manipulate

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[14] Zhao Yiheng 趙毅衡, Jianli yizhong xiandai chanju (建立一種現代禪劇, To Accomplish A Modern Zen-style Play), (Taipei: Erya chuban she 爾雅出版社, 1999), 186-94.

their lives in the battlefield of the rampant human inner subjectivities and the rising religious mood.

Inspired by the religious mood that haunts middle-aged people such like most of the protagonists in his works, Gao applies religious elements as a set of flexible facilities to highlight some of his major concerns about human reality. Often tangled with religious connotations, these dynamic concerns feature in Gao's writings providing a cognitive diversity that contributes to the interpretive complexity of his works.

In contrast with the normalcy of human behaviour, religious mood urges people to remove secular pursuits as well as lifting improper tempers from their spiritual terrains. Principles from Buddhist teachings, for example, ask for people's understanding of human life as a process of approaching *bi'an* (彼岸, the other shore). The protagonist in *Soul Mountain*, half pilgrim and half cynic, is on his way in his pursuit of the other shore while struggling with a variety of conflicts in his secular life. Religious elements are finely interwoven into the protagonist's religious quest that is in constant conflict with his inner being. When in chapter 63 *I* is visiting *Shangqing Palace* (上清宮) on *Qingcheng Mountain* (青城山), a celebrated Taoist temple, he is obsessed with the Taoist teachings of *wuwo* (無我, no self), *wuyu* (無慾, no desire) and *daofa ziran* (道法自然, Tao is after the nature). Yet *I* admits that he cannot abandon the self and his desires at all. Being afraid of being cast into a hermitage, *I* flees the temple in the end.[15] The same situation occurs when *I* comes across a monk by a stone Buddhist pagoda, in chapter 47, and is told: "Of no destination is the genuine Buddhist (沒有目的纔是無上的行者)." Although he is truly charmed by the monk's serene spirit that seems detached from secular trivia, *I* begins to miss the secular world much more.[16] From an alienated perspective created by these religious elements, the obstinacy of an innate humanity with its various inner subjectivities appears in a striking way. Yet still the religious image of *bi'an* anticipates that the protagonist in *One Man's Bible*, after a long stumble in the

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[15] Gao, Soul Mountain, 401-3.
[16] Ibid., 277-80.

human world, finally follows an alternative path to reach spiritual detachment from the rugged reality.

The other shore, a metaphor in its religious sense, can be seen as "the right death, the correct end," in Peter Brooks' term, of narrative.[17] Due to the instinctive repulsion to the end of life, the protagonist of *I* turns against the appeal of religious consolation. This sort of vacillation in the plot, suggests Peter Brooks, brings forth deviance, or detour, which "are characteristics of the narratable, of 'life' as it is the material of narrative."[18] Incorporating religious implications in its narrative detour, the novel *Soul Mountain* vividly presents a cynical human being that is forever lingering between the secular and the divine.

Compared to some classical works in the past that are purposely structured into concrete and meaningful order, the structural elements in Gao's works are barely fabricated carefully into an overarching frame that is supposed to convey specific information concerning the motif. Gao's writing bears a rambling and undisciplined appearance that seems quite astonishing to traditional stylists. Beyond the unstable mannerism, however, a faintly embedded structure becomes clearer in *Soul Mountain* when the religious elements are taken into consideration. Strewed with his wavering religious obsessions, the protagonist's travels across southern China seem a long-distance pilgrimage with the destination of Soul Mountain as the shrine. Coinciding with the eighty-one calamities, in the classical novel *Xiyouji* (西遊記, The Journey to the West), which the master and his three disciples experience in their pilgrimage to the west, in *Soul Mountain* there are eighty-one chapters, the number of which echoes the Buddhist saying of *jiujiu bashiyi nan* (九九八十一難, nine nine eighty-one calamities) that implies a certain number of miseries people have to suffer during their lifetime. Also the protagonist's roundtrip back to the place of departure indicating the cycle of human life, verifies the Taoist saying of *jiujiuguiyi* (九九歸一, nine nine back to one), which implies that it is a kind of routine for all the creatures to return to the beginning once the cyclical period is

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[17] Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," in Literature and Psychoanalysis, the Question of Reading, Otherwise, ed. Shoshana Felman, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 292.
[18] Ibid., 292.

getting full. The *taiyin* (太陰, the great negative) and *taiyang* (太陽, the great positive), between which "I " swims going through the transmigration of death and rebirth in chapter 80, are developed from the Taoist pattern of *taiji* (太極, the supreme ultimate).

Furthermore, once implanted in particular situations, a few terms from Christianity are of metaphorical implication in Gao's works. In *Soul Mountain*, when he is revived from his rebirth, in chapter 81, the protagonist of *I* witnesses a frog with one eye blinking and figures out the creature to be "the God." The transfiguration of the God to a frog with a strange look helps soften the solemn image of the ultimate truth, which seems detached from such a pretentious creature as *I*. As to the term "Bible" used in the novel *One Man's Bible*, the author audaciously switches the term's publicity to its individual ownership, as actually declares an individual's break from the absolute authority of any single will that raged in the land for decades. Meantime, the title of "one man's Bible" also confirms Gao's aesthetic pursuit of "no isms" as a personal posture against any suspicious collective wills.

As early as in Gao's short stories, religious elements are rarely taken as a set of metaphysical references that are alienated from the realistic sufferings facing the characters, partly because the writer was still too young at that time to approach religious concerns for literary or even spiritual breakout. In one of Gao's short stories, *Yuan'en si* (圓恩寺, Yuan'en Temple) (1983), nevertheless, a ruined Buddhist temple unexpectedly touches off feelings about withering life, which are full of expostulatory atmosphere from the religion.[19] While on a honeymoon trip with his bride, the protagonist of *I* is immersed in the bliss of a new life, which exactly conveys the jubilant feeling that cheered up the whole nation once the social catastrophe brought by the Cultural Revolution ended. Confidently believing that nothing in the future can ruin his blissful life, *I* seems possessed of a typical young man's mind that is too naive to anticipate the complexity of human life. As the

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[19] Gao, "Yuan'en si 圓恩寺 (Yuan'en Temple)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 183-94.

background that conjoins the fortunate and the unfortunate, the abandoned Yuan'en Temple offers an occasion for the protagonist to witness the hardship of life. In front of the temple, *I* and his bride become sad when they try to conjecture what could have happened to the mirthless middle-aged man they encounter at the temple site. Moved by both the old temple and the stranger that had been unspeakably tortured in the past, the protagonist falls into an obsession with the reality of life. Although what is attractive about the temple to people is the appeal of secular leisure, the temple itself still resonates with voiceless revelations that only through religion can the protagonist understand the capsizing universe by the slanting sky over the upturned eaves of the temple, and the ever varying human destination by the sight of a tottering tile on the verge of the eaves.

4. Nether World; an Alternative Reality That Mirrors This World

Death, as well as the fear aroused by death, is one of the ultimate subjects dealt with in Gao's writings. This is reflected in the characters' lasting obsession with death within a large number of texts in his works. Through his writing about death and the dead, the author seems to be trying to construct a lively nether world that is an alternative to the living world. As a counterpart of *yangjian* (陽間, the living world), *yinjian* (陰間, the nether world) is represented in Gao's works as an alienated setting to mirror those alive in this world. By applying specific representative medium such as dreams, fantasies and reminiscences, Gao succeeds in constructing a concrete nether world from time to time in his works, as though the dead are living an exactly alternative life to the alive. While arousing characters' feelings of loneliness, fear and sentiment, the depictions of the nether world remould people's viewpoints about an alternative reality to human existence.

Initially in *Soul Mountain*, the nether world makes possible the communication between the protagonist of *I* and his dead family members. While travelling in the mountains, in chapter 37, *I* arrives at a ghost town where he happens to stand at a collapsed house site. Separated by a broken wall, *I* and his dead family

members communicate spiritually with each other, since the dead people are not approachable at all. When the dead talk about the mess of the protagonist's life as they had been doing while alive, *I* still feels as uncomfortable as usual, but *I* finds himself preferring to stay among them enduring the trivial talk rather than being left alone in a deserted world. All of a sudden, *I* comes to understand that it is so blissful to be with his beloved family members with nothing to worry about. Yet with his parents and grandma lingering in the nether world, no longer can he expect that kind of secular happiness in this living world. Accommodating one's beloved people as well as all the memories of them, the nether world brings to the living the sadness of being isolated by the invisible curtain of death.

And then, once the curtain of death is traversed, the protagonist's experience in the nether world discloses the sharp tension between the alive and the bitter life within this living world:

> You feel you are walking in the river, under your feet are river weeds. You are submerged in the River of Forgetting, in tangled river weeds, and you seem to be anxious. At this moment, however, the despair of not belonging vanishes and your feet simply feel their way along the riverbed. You tread on smooth pebbles and curl your toes tightly around them. It is like sleepwalking in the darkness of the River of Death, it is only where the spray is churned up that there is a dark blue glow tinged with beads of quicksilver. You can't help being amazed, and it is amazement tinged with joy.
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> Afterwards you hear heavy sighing. You think it is the river but gradually you make out that it is not one but several women who have drowned in the river. They are wretched, groaning, and their hair is bedraggled, and one by one they go past, their faces waxen and devoid of colour. There is girl who kills herself by jumping into the river where the water gurgles in the holes at the roots of the trees, and her hair drifts with the flow of the current. The river threads through the dark forest which blocks out the sun and not a glimmer of sky is visible. The drowned, sighing women drift by but you do not think to rescue them, do not even think to rescue yourself.
>
> You know you are wandering in the nether world, that life is not within your grasp. You are still breathing because of your bewilderment and life is suspended from one moment to the next of this bewilderment. If your feet slip, if the pebbles under your toes start rolling and in your next step you can't touch the bottom, you too will drown in the River of Death like the floating corpses, and you will sigh with them. It is as simple as that, so there is no need to be especially cautious and you just keep walking. Silent river, black dead water. The leaves of low-hanging branches sweep the surface there are lines of currents, like bed sheets which were snatched off by the current as they were being

washed in the river, or like the pelts of so many wolves.

. . . . . .

The realization brings you joy, you are so happy you want to shout. You shout but there is no sound, the only sound is the gurgling of the water as it strikes the holes at the roots of the trees in the river.

Where do the holes come from? The watery region is vast and boundless but it is not very deep and there are no banks. There is a saying that the sea of suffering is boundless, you are drifting in this sea of suffering.[20]

The nether world is realized through the fantasy within which *you* is wading in the *minghe* (冥河, river of death). The scenes above and below the nether water seem cold, dark and colourless. The whole space is filled with an ice-cold air of death, and the sighs of drowned women keep reminding *you* of females from his past, who committed suicide or were killed by masculine carnality. In spite of the horrible scenes over the nether water, *you* feels highly delighted since he has finally freed himself from the weariness and sufferings in a normal human life. Some negative conclusions about this living world can be arrived at by interpreting those alternative names for the nether water in the same chapter. As a transitive space that is leading to the nether world, the nether river is also identified as *wanghe* (忘河, river of forgetting) that is supposed to help remove people's attachments to this living life from their spirits, as well as *kuhai* (苦海, sea of suffering) that symbolises one's lifetime containing endless pains and suffering.

Besides his own obsession with death, the threat from which once profoundly affected his life, Gao's imaginary and literary representation of the nether world seem partly influenced by the local culture of *Ba Shu* (巴蜀) area along the upper reaches of the *Yangtze* River. The witchcraft rituals, which are intended to allow communication between the nether world and the living world, are popular and highly developed in the area. Through field research in *Ba Shu* area, Gao collected a large number of lyrics people would give voice to in witchcraft involving sacrificial rituals. These lyrics are usually sang during the process of *zhaohun* (招魂, to call back the spirits of the dead), which reflects that, according to the native people's knowledge about death and the nether world, the spirits of the dead would not

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[20] Gao, Soul Mountain, 419-21.

disappear and have to be called back. Chapter 42 of the novel is all about another trip taken by *you* in the nether world, where people with vague faces keep singing the lyrics of *zhaohun* to console the spirit of the visitor. *You* seems to be ignorant of his death until he realizes that the man lying on the door plank is his own body. The thrilling effect resulting from the experience of the separation of soul and body in the nether world also echoes in Gao's writing about the living world where physical and spiritual parts are usually loosely conjoined.

In Gao's earlier writings, different from those in *Soul Mountain* where the protagonists can flexibly approach the nether world experiencing their after lives, a solid obstruction that lies between the nether world and this living world implies the writer's restrained imagination when dealing with particular subjects that were beyond the society's suppressed literary taste during the 1980s. With the impenetrable barrier separating the alive from the dead, the story of *Muqin* (母親, Mother) (1983) seems a son's repentance to be made before his mother, who died in harsh social surroundings, looming from the nether world.[21] The mother within the story died from poor health as a result of a lack of food, since in the years of famine she still tried to save food for her beloved child who was returning home from college. *I,* the son, ascribes his mother's death to his neglect of filial duty. Filled with the sense of past sins, *I* immerses himself in a sad recall of his mother's bitter life when facing her silhouette as it steps from the nether world. Like most of the characters coming from the nether world in Gao's *Soul Mountain*, the mother is voiceless throughout the meeting showing her extreme sadness about her unrealized happy prospect of the reunion with her son instead of the disappointment with him as *I* confesses. By working particular incidents onto the mother's image in her after life, which can not happen in a real world, the writer seems to be trying to alienate the character's attachment to life from the rigour of reality. The worn out cheongsam the mother wears, which used to be the evidence of one's guilt as *sijiu* (四舊, the

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[21] Gao, "Muqin 母親 (Mother)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 195-206.

four olds),[22] comes to typify her stubborn pursuit of an individual's elegance and dignity. The burning wreaths dancing in the air, which *I* assumes show condemnation from his mother's restless spirit, actually indicate that in the son's mind his mother's soul in the after life is still struggling within endless bitterness.

5. Cultural Otherness: the Heresy to Overturn the Orthodoxy of History

The protagonists in Gao's novels enjoy roaming over strange lands, although they are actually forced to leave their original surroundings for political reasons. Seemingly feeling comfortable with his status as a fugitive, Gao accepts exile, which offers him the chance to visit people in exotic scenes while searching for a broader view about human life. Gao's novels are just like the records of a roaming poet experiencing both the strange cultures and his often overwhelmed spirituality. The cultural and spiritual otherness produces alienated perspectives allowing the writer to look at human traits that are always focused on by "Cold Literature."

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, the writer seems to devote himself to a panoramic description of the local culture along the reaches of the *Yangtze* River, which is supposed to have influenced the development of Chinese civilization together with the northern culture of *Huanghe* (黄河, Yellow River) that sometimes is also called the culture of *Zhongyuan* (中原, central plains). Although both the *Yangtze* River and the Yellow River are normally acknowledged as important waters that bred the nation, the Yellow River has been worshipped especially as the primary cradle of ancient Chinese civilization. Gao argues that, different from the Yellow River that originated a centralised and orthodox culture of feudalistic emperors and Confucianism, the *Yangtze* River gave birth to a prosperous folk culture that is typified by myths, witchcraft, folk lyrics, and the reclusive religious practices of Buddhism and Taoism.[23] In contrast to the northern culture of the Yellow River that

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[22] During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), old ideas 舊思想, old culture 舊文化, old customs 舊風俗 and old habits 舊習慣 were attacked as Four Olds that were to be overturned.

[23] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue, guanyu lingshan 文學与玄學・關於《靈山》 (Literature and Metaphysics, about Soul Mountain)," in Meiyou zhuyi 没有主义 (No Isms), 3rd ed. (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地图书有限公司, 2000), 179-81.

values a secular authoritative dominion over individual welfare, the southern culture of the *Yangtze* River seems to be of natural and religious plurality that encourages spiritual pursuits of individuality.

First of all, along the upper reaches of the *Yangtze* River there are large areas of primitive forests which had been kept intact in the past preserving precious species and natural landscapes. Two primitive habitats referred to in the novel are the natural reserves of *Shennongjia* (神農架, the Holy Farmer Shelf) and *Wolongshan* (臥龍山, the Crouching Dragon Mountain). On the one hand, these primitive areas have provoked people's curiosity about a mysterious world they have never known. The knowledge inherited for generations among the local people living in the areas is still in the form of myths about primitive species, such as the poisonous *wubulong* (五步龍, five-step-dragon) and the magical *qimu* (杞木, Qi wood) that is said to be able to cure people off jealousy. In these legendary forms, people's imagination about the primitive species reflects an intensive yet balanced relationship between Nature and human activities. On the other hand, the primitive areas are typified as ultimate Nature, which is full of treasures of wisdom both the ancient sages and the protagonist have been trying to approach.

Secondly, along the upper and middle reaches of the *Yangtze* River are areas where *Han* (漢) people and a variety of minorities reside together. The protagonist's trip covers the areas of *Yun* (雲), *Chuan* (川), *Qian* (黔), *E* (鄂), *Xiang* (湘), *Su* (蘇), and *Zhe* (浙). In the south-west areas of the hinterland, the protagonist travels through the minority areas of *Yi* (彝), *Qiang* (羌), *Miao* (苗), *Dong* (侗), and *Tujia* (土家), where the local culture of *Wu* (巫, witch practice) is quite developed. During the trip in these areas, *I* keeps collecting materials of local customs including mourning lyrics, local opera such as *Nuoxi* (傩戲, Nuo opera), witchcraft, and sacrificial rituals. It is under the influence of the culture of local minorities that *Hei'an Zhuan* (黑暗傳, The Record of Darkness), the historical epic of local *Han* people, developed from mourning lyrics and acquired the mysterious atmosphere of the *Wu* culture. One of the major features of the *Wu* culture is in its emphasis on the

communication between the living and the ghosts/gods, which reflects a primitive belief of local people in the immortality of souls.

Thirdly, along the middle and lower reaches of the *Yangtze* River are the areas where the traditional religions of Buddhism and Taoism are widespread. The Buddhist temples mushroomed in *Jiangnan* (江南, the south of *Yangtze* River) during the *Southern Dynasties* (南朝), and nowadays are being reclaimed from the religious suppression of the Cultural Revolution. Taoism is a locally born religion of China that geographically originated from the southern areas. In *Soul Mountain*, a few religious sites are chosen as the surroundings in which to perform stories, such as the Buddhist *Guoqing Temple* (國清寺) at *Tiantai Mountain* (天臺山) in *Zhejiang* (浙江) province and the Taoist *Shangqing Palace* (上清宮) at *Qingcheng Mountain* (青城山) in *Sichuan*(四川) province. Both Buddhism and Taoism in the novel are depicted as religious shelters for the reclusive philosophy of c*hushi* (出世) to resist the Confucian philosophy of *rushi* (入世) that represents the authoritative tradition as well as the secular politics in northern culture.

Finally, as Gao indicates, archaeological studies show that the local areas along the range of the *Yangtze* River were developed as early as the Neolithic Age. Recent archaeological discoveries of the local ancient cultures such as *Hemudu* (河姆渡) and *Liangzhu* (良渚) have challenged the solid status of the Yellow River as the earliest source of Chinese civilization.[24] Enlightened by the historical fact that the southern cultures along the *Yangtze* River has been kept subordinate to the orthodox culture of the Yellow River, the writer urges the protagonist of *I* to query the authenticity of history in front of a stone tablet with strange ancient characters on it:

> In Yu's tomb there are now artefacts for reference but the experts still cannot decipher the tadpole-like script on the stone epitaph opposite the main hall. I look at it from various angles, ruminate for a long time, and suddenly it occurs to me that it can be read in this way: history is a riddle,
>
> it can also be read as: history is lies
>
> and it can also be read as: history is nonsense

[24] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue," 180-81.

and yet it can be read as: history is prediction
and then it can be read as: history is sour fruit
yet still it can be read as: history clangs like iron
and it can be read as: history is balls of wheat-flour dumplings
or it can be read as: history is shrouds for wrapping corpses
or taking it further it can be read as: history is a drug to induce sweating
or taking it further it can also be read as: history is ghosts banging on walls
and in the same way it can be read as: history is antiques
and even: history is rational thinking
or even: history is experience
and even: history is proof
and even: history is a dish of scattered pearls
and even: history is a sequence of cause and effect
or else: history is analogy
or: history is a state of mind
and furthermore: history is history
and: history is absolutely nothing
even: history is sad sighs
Oh history oh history oh history oh history
Actually history can be read any way and this is a major discovery![25]

Through a cynical poem-like soliloquy, the solidity of history is scattered into a series of disordered images. Not only does the logic of history degenerate into sheer chaos, but also the everlasting orthodoxy of official interpretation of history is ridiculed. The query concerning the authenticity of history echoes one of the imbedded pursuits of the protagonist's journey, which is to recover things once subdued in the shadow of cultural stereotypes. In chapter 29, facing the muddy water of the Yellow River, the protagonist of *you* questions the river's symbolic eligibility to be treated as the origin of a nation. The muddy turbulence reminds *you* of nothing but poverty and disaster, which have been disguised by blind eulogies on history.

While the domestic cultural otherness in *Soul Mountain* serves to collapse the authoritative myth of a nation's history, a foreign cultural otherness in *One Man's Bible* sets up a solid distance to make possible a detached inspection of an individual's history. From the central plain in France to the primitive forest close to Sydney, from an international conference center in Stockholm to a Mexican bar in Manhattan, from a performance stage in Hong Kong to a book fair in the military port of Toulon, "you wander from country to country, city to city, woman to woman,

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[25] Gao, Soul Mountian, 450-51.

but don't think of finding a place that is home."[26] The protagonist's wanderings from place to place are far beyond the feelings of the homeless. Nevertheless, it is his affinity with the cultural, or geographical, otherness that drives him away from his physical home. This affinity can even be traced back to the protagonist's earliest exotic experience during his adolescence: after reading one of Mérimée's novels, *he* is dreaming of sleeping with a cold marble statue of a naked female body in a garden full of uncut grass.[27] It is the teenager's dream, both an exotic and erotic experience, that discloses the exuberant vigour of human beings to the protagonist. When the vigorous inner nature is oppressed by a collective will, the protagonist is compelled to conduct a self-censorship of his instincts while releasing them in a distorted way. In contrast with a native culture that is trying to stifle one's nature as a human, the cultural otherness appears to be a sanctuary to accommodate the human soul. Staying in a cultural otherness, the protagonist tries to bid farewell to his personal history which prevents him from being a vigorous creature. It is the sense of alienation that sharpens the protagonist's perspective on human traits when he is put into exile and roams around the world.

In his short stories in the 1980s, Gao sometimes focuses the fictional subjects on the conflicts between stagnated rural life and the burgeoning social fashions in cities. The short story *Xiejiang he tade nü'er* (鞋匠和他的女兒, The Shoemaker and His Daughter) (1982) is about a family tragedy taking place in the countryside, and reflects the solid barrier existing between urban and rural areas.[28] The story is narrated in the voice of a countrywoman who is talking to investigators from the city about an incident, in which the daughter of a shoemaker commits suicide and her father dies in front of the girl's dead body. From the perspective of the countryside, which conveys its economical and cultural otherness to the city, the story reveals the residual ethical restrictions that are typified by suppression from a paternalistic authority and by people using suicide to resist. Even when the reformative elements

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[26] Gao, One Man's Bible, 426.
[27] Ibid., 295-96.
[28] Gao, "Xiejiang he tade nu'er 鞋匠和他的女兒 (The Shoemaker and His Daughter)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 131-36.

of social organization and ideology symbolized by *hezuoshe* (合作社, co-operative agency) and *Zhongguo qingnian* (中國青年, Chinese Youth) are spreading into the rural area, the ignorance of human nature and cruelty in human relationships are still looming in the family units. Although for a whole century the nation has gone through a series of earth shattering social and cultural revolutions, the transformation of people's faith in the values of life is still subject to failure when faced by a strong secular will.

6. Spiritual Otherness, the Instantaneous Detachment from the Self

During the process of introspection, a literary experience of self-reflection in Gao's works, a spiritual otherness is often alienated from the autonomous self, highlighting the complexities of the spirituality and physicality of human existence. One's spiritual existence seems often detached from one's physical existence, since the latter keeps imposing physical needs on the former that is expected to conduct conscious activities. The inner subjectivities, which include desire, fear, loneliness and insanity, are somehow brought forth by the spiritual entanglement with physical needs. However, while the realistic elements such as time and space designating one's existence keep varying, a spiritual otherness is easily detached, carrying out external observations as well as judgments on the heterogeneous spiritual deeds of the same human subject. The variety and incompatibility of one's spiritual concerns are so common that there seems scarcely any consistent spirituality lodged within human existence. The spiritual otherness as alienation reflects self-noncoincidence, the split of one's self-knowledge, according to Jaques Lacan (1901-1981), which reveals the psychic vacillation in spite of the lure of self-presence.[29]

The separation of the spirit from the body is usually dealt with in a fantastic plot in Chinese ancient romances. In Gao's works, the representation of the same issue is fully realistic in the sense of its reflection of the psychological spiritual detachment from the body. From the view of Chinese culture, the human spirit is

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[29] Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconsciousness, or Reason Since Freud," in Écrits, trans. Bruce Fink, et al, (New York: Norton, 2006), 429-30.

normally attributed to *yin* (陰, the negative), one of the epistemological categories about universal existence, since it appears to be an inner and invisible world within one's physical existence. Correspondingly, the outer and visible features of one's physical existence are identified as *yang* (陽, the positive). To outline the usually untraceable spiritual events, Gao applies a series of rhetorical methods such as personalization, objectification, transformation and even stream-of-consciousness to concretely as well as flexibly represent the myriad subtle scenes within the human spirit. Meanwhile, Gao keeps challenging himself to catch the constantly varying pictures of the human spirit from instantaneous perspectives, producing startling effects in the tension between the spirit and the body. As to the style of the literary representation of human spiritual deeds, Gao's writing seems imbued with impressionism that finds its equivalence in his ink and wash paintings.

One of these impressionistic depictions of the human spirit can be traced in chapter 19 of *Soul Mountain*. In contrast to the warm atmosphere within which *he* is staying with *she*, the spiritual images of the protagonist appear to be ice-cold, dark, and transparent. The supposedly colourful spiritual scenes all look black and white. It is through an instantaneous as well as impressionistic portrait that these colourless and cool spiritual scenes construct a mysterious, blurry and unfeeling world that proves to be the projection of protagonist's inner life:

> On this chilly late-autumn night, dense heavy darkness encloses a totality of primitive chaos; indistinguishable are sky and earth, trees and rocks, and needless to say the road; you can only stay transfixed, lean forward, put out both arms to grope, to grope in this thick dark night; you hear it in motion, it is not the wind in motion but this darkness which is devoid of top bottom left right distance and sequence; you are wholly fused with this chaos, conscious only that you once possessed the outline of a body, but that this outline in your consciousness is rapidly vanishing; a light emanates from your body, dim like a candle in the darkness, a flame with light but no warmth, a cold light which fills your body, transcending the outline of your body and the outline of your body in your mind; you draw it into your arms, strive to guard this ball of light, this icy transparent consciousness; you need this sensitivity, you strive to protect it; a tranquil lake appears before you, on the other shore is a wood with trees which have shed all their leaves and trees which haven't shed all their leaves; the yellow leaves on the tall poplar and the two small pale yellow leaves on the black branches of the date tree tremble; bright red tallow trees, some thick and some sparse, are like balls of mist; there are no ripples on the lake, only

> reflections, clear and distinct, rich colours, many shades ranging from dark red to bright red to orange to light yellow to inky green, to greyish-brown, to bluish-white; on careful scrutiny these suddenly fade, turning into different shades of grey, black, white, like an old faded black and white photograph; vivid images lie before your eyes but instead of standing on the ground you are in another dimension, staring with bated breath at the images of your own mind; it is so tranquil, disturbingly tranquil, you feel it is a dream; there is no need to be anxious but you can't help being anxious because it is too strangely tranquil.[30]

While drawing a gloomy picture of the inner life that is usually in sharp contrast to the outer world, Gao focuses the literary representation on those moments when the soul and body are dramatically separated. Gao's attempts to display a soul detached from the body reflects his intention of exploring the deep reality of an individual's being that is crushed in an abnormal society. In chapter 64, *you* tells his partner a story about *he* whose soul becomes separated from his body. Experiencing his soul rising into the air over his head, *he* feels the most amazing insight into the human condition that he has ever experienced. *He* comes to the conclusion that all the pains of human life originate from the body, while a free self remains within the soul. At this moment, the protagonist's existence is divided into two with the spiritual *he* standing behind and looking at the physical *he*. Without his soul, the physical *he* becomes so weak that even a light tap from behind would scare him to collapse. Working on the soul's isolation from the body, Gao seems to be trying to reaffirm that the soul is the real origin of the self, and the body only serves as a temporary shelter for the soul.

You's awareness of his soul's detachment from his body, in both chapter 19 and chapter 64, coincides with his indulgences in carnality with his partners. This consciously arranged coincidence shows the torture of desire, as one of the inner subjectivities bridging the flesh and the soul, is one of the fierce tensions existing between the two categories. Because of a solid compromise with the realistic sufferings of human body, the inner subjectivities such as fear, loneliness, desire and insanity continuously torture the human soul. Thus the co-existence of soul and flesh becomes the greatest dilemma facing human existence, within which the ultimate freedom of being a human seems hopeless. As the protagonist's journey shows in

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[30] Gao, Soul Mountain, 113-14.

Soul Mountain, human life actually lingers between the two extremities of the soul and body. It is the everlasting compromise of the soul with the body that instigates various inner subjectivities within human consciousness. In chapter 80, even after *you* experiences rebirth from death, the soul still has to be combined with the body to form a perceptual life. Hence in the last chapter of the novel, looking like a frog with one eye open and the other closed, the God is trying to console the poor man's embarrassment:

> "There are no miracles."
> "Then what else is there to seek?"
> "Snow is falling."[31]

It is the spiritual otherness that more or less moderates the embarrassment caused by the basic dilemma facing a human being. Detached from the realistic world, spiritual otherness acts as an overarching voice that either mocks or consoles one's soul. It reveals the conflicts between human subjectivities and their surroundings. With time and space varying, a spiritual otherness that is entirely diverse from the original spiritual status has developed. In most cases in Gao's works, it is the dislocation of time and space that provides a proper distance from which the spiritual otherness observes and reassess one's spiritual history. At this point, both the spiritual otherness and the distance regarding time and space help explain the writer's ingenious application of shifting personal pronouns to cover the same personal identity. In chapter 31 of *One Man's Bible*, the protagonist of *he* crawls through a muddy swamp at night and climbs into an area highlighted by spotlights from above. *He* realizes that he is standing naked on a stage under the inspection of *you* sitting alone at the rear of the theatre.[32] From the distance between the stage and the audience, which actually typifies the distance between the now and past, *you* is watching his own figure from a perspective of his spiritual otherness. From the alienated view of *you*, the real spiritual status of *he*, who was just fighting his way out of the muddy swamp, seems extremely awkward and pitiful. Once *he* gets out of the vile surroundings, a series of images that indicate the spiritual otherness enter his mind in the form of a long passage of free association that shows

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[31] Gao, Soul Mountain, 526.
[32] Gao, One Man's Bible, 248-51.

how boundless one's spirituality could be on earth. While embodying freedom of thought as an integral aspect of human existence, the spiritual otherness discloses the transience of spirituality by virtue of the variances of such realistic elements as time and space, which prompt spiritual alienation at different moments of one's being.

Due to the writer's more mature and precise perception of the spiritual qualities of human existence during the later period of his literary creation, the representation concerning the characters' spiritual otherness in Gao's two novels more effectively touches the reality of human life as an infinitely ongoing process of alienation from its alternatives. Yet in Gao's short stories from an earlier period, the depiction of spiritual otherness seems to be simply working as a metaphor of the split in young minds awoken from their egoism. The story *Wuru* (侮辱, Humiliation) (1983) tells of the withering process of a girl's naiveté under pressures from society.[33] Driven by an unmannered egoism, the protagonist of *she* is living in her young dream that people around her would appreciate and treat her in the same way as she treats them. Not until one day when she suffers a series of humiliations has *she* anticipated any hurts from her surroundings. S*he* becomes so obsessed with the discovery that people are capable of showing malicious attitudes toward her because of her dressiness and independent temperament that her previously untouched personality experiences a break-down within an exhausting nightmare. A spiritual otherness typified by the elevated spiritual self weeping at the unconscious bodily self emerges as a metaphorical device indicating the simplicity as well as the integrity of a natural being that is damaged in an uproarious earthly world. A perverse social desire to stifle unaffected characters is realized by the successive "humiliations", the accumulation of which functions as a collective conspiracy imposed on individuals. Although the conveying of spiritual alienation in this story seems artificial in terms of its excessively poetic style, the writer's conscious contemplation and description of the dynamic spiritual world of human beings came into being. A considerable number of representations of spiritual otherness in Gao's novels can find their early version in this story.

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[33] Gao, "Wuru 侮辱 (Humiliations)."in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 207-18.

7. The Uncanny: Extraordinary transmigration and Retribution

What the protagonists in Gao's works are experiencing and discovering about their lives is sometimes unexplainable. Dreadful or mysterious, these experiences are not about ordinary experiences, but about the fundamental human condition that is alienated from the ordinary sense of daily life. Heidegger put this situation more clearly: "At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny."[34] A feeling of something uncanny can be traced in some of Gao's works. This literary concern for the uncanny in part comes from the unexplainable reality of the human condition, and in part develops from the author's need to convey his perceptions about human inner subjectivities. The uncanny seems to be an alienated voice to moderate the turbulence of human inner being.

While dealing with the uncanny as an alienated perspective of human life,, Gao more often chooses elements from Chinese folk culture, such as *lunhui* (輪迴, transmigration) and *baoying* (報應, retribution), to enrich the atmosphere of the uncanny. Both transmigration and retribution are considered in the culture to be mysterious loops that dominate personal life and social development. With every element of personal or historical life cycling endlessly, the individual or the society is just copying or suffering from what has been accomplished in earlier times. It has to be noted that Chinese proletarian writing since Mao's *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literary Art* resists any metaphysical approach as to its representative method so that it cannot truly meet a nation's need for mature literature, which is supposed to reflect fundamental concerns about the human condition. Yet Gao's Cold Literature raises metaphysical concerns about human beings in an attempt to explain the reality of personal and historical life that from some of its aspects is unexplainable and untraceable. A major pattern in Gao's metaphysical approach is the animated loop of transmigration and retribution, which is especially typified by the cyclical nature of the journey in the novel *Soul Mountain*. The journey in *Soul Mountain* circles back

[34] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), 54.

at last to its starting point, where the protagonist once set off to the south at the very beginning and is eventually entangled in daily trivia again. All the paths the protagonist tries to follow to escape turn out to form a huge self-enclosed circle that leads to the destiny nobody can successfully escape from.

In *Soul Mountain*, an awareness of transmigration is first evoked by Nature in the form of the extensive primitive forests in southern China. Amazingly full of the wisdom of life, the primitive natural ecology has been ignored and even tormented by local people. The principle of transmigration is one of the revelations from Nature concerning the destiny of human beings that has puzzled the protagonist. In chapter 8, entering a primitive reserve for pandas with an old biologist, *I* encounters the law of transmigration as well as the subordination of human beings to Nature:

> He's here collecting specimens of Cold Arrow Bamboo, the food of the giant panda. I go with him into a clump of dead Cold Arrow Bamboos which are the height of a man, but there isn't a single live bamboo plant to be found. He says it takes a full sixty years for the Cold Arrow Bamboo to go through the cycle of flowering, seeding, dying and for the seeds to sprout, grow, and flower. According to Buddhist teachings of transmigration this would be exactly one *kalpa*.
>
> "Man follows earth, earth follows sky, sky follows the way, the way follows nature," he proclaims loudly. "Don't commit actions which go against the basic character of nature, don't commit acts which should not be committed."[35]

Despite the arrogance of human beings toward natural laws, revelations from Nature makes *I* feel more aware of the natural essence of human life. Yet the protagonist will not consider himself a miracle of Nature until in chapter 80 he finally experiences the transmigration of life from death to rebirth in the air of *hundun* (混沌, chaos) combined by *yin* (the negative) and *yang* (the positive). The stories *you* keeps telling *she* also illustrate the circulation of human destiny from which people can never escape. In chapter 36 and 38, the protagonist's narration goes back and forth within a period of five hundred years, which can be seen as a circulation of *jie* (劫, calamity). The conflagration that destroys the temple on the mountain at one time foretells the fire that burns off the warlord's old mansion on the same mountain at another. Incited by the roar of the human world, the

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[35] Gao, Soul Mountain, 47-48.

hibernating fire, which typifies the everlasting exterminating force of *Hundun*, just blasts after every specific period according to the rule of transmigration.

Along with transmigration comes retribution which more fiercely reminds people of a proper attitude and behaviour in daily life. The circulation of retribution operates as an animated version of transmigration, revealing the consistent universal laws regarding both Nature and human life. As an outer force beyond inner subjectivities, the uncanny retribution performs a secular effect when advising people to conform to ethical regulations by the revelation that someday they will definitely benefit or suffer from what they have done to others. Yet it is tackled in the novel mainly as an uncanny destiny confronting human beings instead of a moralistic sermon on Confucian orthodoxy. In chapter 29, it is shown as retribution for his maltreatment of a dumb girl a long time ago when the old carpenter is killed in the fire once he finishes his last masterpiece:

> The shaman of Tianmenguan has sent someone to the carpenter's yard to get the old man to make the head of the Goddess Tianluo. The shaman will come in person on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month to invite the goddess to receive offerings at his altar. The messenger has brought a live goose as a deposit and the work is to be completed on schedule. The old man will then be given a jar of rice wine and half of a pig's head which will be plenty to see him through the New Year. The old man is petrified and realizes that he doesn't have many days. The Goddess Guanyin rules over the living and the goddess Tianluo rules over the dead: the Goddess is coming to hasten the end of his life.[36]

Fundamentally, neither transmigration nor retribution is the ultimate way of sustaining justice and the sublime, but only an uncanny element of the unexplainable universal law. People would easily find that a scathing retribution detonates people's desire for revenge on the unfair human world. Hence the stories concerning transmigration and retribution are intertwined with each other, constructing a chaotic, but real, world. Gao is not eager to build a smooth and clear world order in his writing at all. On the contrary, what he is trying to disclose is the everlasting confrontation between chaos and the uncanny that is working regularly in the real world.

The mysterious nature of transmigration and retribution is deeply rooted in

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[36] Gao, Soul Mountain, 162.

the Buddhist concept of *yinguo* (因果, cause and effect) that determines the basic format of world order. In a historical stage when people have no confidence in life, human fate is supposed to be preordained by the endless cycling of *Yin* (因, cause)and *Guo* (果, effect), the cognitive mode of which is the same as the interaction of *yin* (the negative) and *yang* (the positive) according to Taoism. As it is related by the narrator in chapter 59 of *One Man's Bible*, it is the cycling of *yin* and *guo* that helps produce the various worries from which people suffer. In order to escape from the abyss of *yinguo*, people try to build up perfect selves with their inner intentions disciplined in accordance with specific rules. Yet this is in vain, according to the narrator, since the self, like all the rules in the world, is abstracted from non-existence.[37] So why do people bother to worry about something that is nonexistent?

It is the eternal "now," concludes the protagonist in *One Man's Bible*, that is the effective power in terms of solving all the mysteries presented by *yinguo*. From *he* who seeks to survive during the Cultural Revolution, to *you* who is roaming all over the world enjoying instantaneous delights, the protagonist finally achieves confidence in his own life. He learns not to look back or forward for reasons, but to focus on this instant that discloses the truth of life itself. The novel's title *One Man's Bible* tells of an individual's firm belief in this moment among infinite instants of human life. It is the timeless here and now that endows the inner subjectivities of human beings with realistic qualities. Once people are exclusively responsible for their feelings at a specific moment, they are capable of liberating themselves from all worries produced by the uncanny. Here behind the metaphysical atmosphere of the Cold Literature, Gao's writing itself seems ambitious to bring its subject down to the humane ground so that confidence lost in the literary realm about being can be regained.

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[37] Gao, One Man's Bible, 438-39.

Chapter Five

The Foregrounding of Poetic Devices

To Artificialize the Natural

In Roman Jakobson's model of linguistic communication, "poetic function" focuses on how the element of "message" is constructed with all its linguistic constituent parts.[1] Taking storytelling as a particular form of communication, Wayne C. Booth presents a model of narrative communication that contains "text" in place of "message" in Jakobson's model.[2] Consequently, in the context of narrative, the "poetic function" comes to focus on how the element of "text" is constructed with all its narrative constituent parts. One of the empirical features of the poetics in Gao's Cold Literature resides in its conspicuous manipulation of a series of literary devices, which works out a daunting effect onto the readership. Such a strategy of elevating poetic devices over the story or plot typifies Jakobson's concept of "foregrounding of the poetic function," which refers to the communicating essential of "foregrounding" the formal devices and "backgrounding" the referentials.[3]

On the other hand, like the forms of human behaviour, the forms and techniques adopted by art work should be able to trace their "primordial images," or "archetypes," argues Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), in the universal human experience if the poetic function of artistic communication is still trying to help "transmute our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind."[4] Jung suggests that the creative process of great art is actually giving shape to the archetype of "the deepest springs of life,"[5] which is surely reflected in the artistic artifices as well.

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[1] Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Selected Writings II: Word and Language, (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 239-59. The six elements and corresponding functions in Jakobson's model of linguistic communication are: sender (expressive), receiver (vocative), message (poetic), code (metalingual), contact (phatic), and context (referential).

[2] Booth's pattern of narrative contains such elements as real author, implied author, narrator, text, narratee, implied reader and real reader. See Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 23-86, 149-65, 211-66. For a revised articulation on the relationship between implied authors and readers, see Wayne C. Booth, The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1988), 169-98.

[3] Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," 239-59.

[4] Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," in The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1001.

[5] Ibid., 1002.

Such literary devices as irony, absurdism, symbolism, magical realism and so forth all can find their archetypical roots in human experience, and so do those specific poetic innovations or reformulations in Gao's fictional texts. One common characteristic among various poetic devices of Cold Literature is that they all dismiss a solid and unchanging perspective of human life, since the duplicity or multiplicity of the reality, as the revelational archetype of literary creation, tends to undermine the very solidity of human situations and prospects.

1. Parallel Structure: An Analogy of the Duplicity of Human Existence

Since each chapter alternately adopts either *I* or *you* as the protagonist, the 81 chapters in the novel *Soul Mountain* can be divided into the *I* chapters and the *you* chapters. Correspondingly the two groups of texts alternately cover two journeys by which "the first person 'I' is travelling in realities and the second person 'you' is spiritually travelling in imaginations."[6] Although the protagonists *you* and *I* are developed from the same personality, their journeys are literally independent and seldom intersect with each other. Based on the parallel journeys, a parallel structure is composed to support the story line of the novel. It is within this parallel structure that the two pronominal protagonists are engaged in their self-enclosed journeys that are heading toward one overlapping destination at the end.

Different from the two-thread structure that usually keeps one thread apparent with the other hidden, the parallel structure in *Soul Mountain* covers the two journeys with equal allocation of writing. Through this dominant use of parallel structure, Gao explores the duplicity of human existence. Just like the pair of elements, *zhen* (真, the real) and *jia* (假, the false), which are embedded in the narrative of *Hongloumeng* (紅樓夢, A Dream in the Red Chamber), the opposing situations of original self and real self construct a duplicity of an individual's existence in *Soul Mountain*, which encompasses the duplex factors of human existence such as flesh and soul, being and nihility, reality and fantasy, and life and

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[6] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue," 177.

death. Philosophically, the viewpoint regarding the duplicity of human existence is rooted in the theory of *Tao* (道), which views the world by the pair of contra-posed principles of *yin* (陰, the negative) and *yang* (陽, the positive). Chinese culture is so influenced by this kind of dualistic dialectic that the elements of *yin* and *yang* can be traced in classical philosophical discussions and literary works. Nevertheless, this traditional dualistic worldview has been experiencing a decline, ever since the communist authority has taken its anti-tradition policy as a reaction against threats from other ideologies. Gao's reinterpretation of the traditional dualistic philosophy seems a purposeful return to the abandoned ancient wisdom appealing for a revelation of an individual's obsession in the modern era. Meanwhile, as the writer represents in the novel, a traditional viewpoint bearing the primordial duplex structure still indomitably exists in forms of witchcraft, folk lyrics, domestically delivered myths, and in the folk culture along the *Yangtze* River.

The parallel structure also seems to be fabricated on purpose to meet Gao's advocacy of Cold Literature, the standpoint of which is supposed to be aloof from the physical existence of human beings. Since "the Cold Literature bears an unchangeable objective of tracing the untraceable self of human being,"[7] Gao comes to focus his writing on the tension between the physical and spiritual nature of human beings. To highlight the always hidden and invisible tension, the pronouns *you* and *I* are adopted to personalize the different beings within one's existence. The parallel structure, an analogy to the duplicity of human existence, creates a frame the strings of which are able to motivate the separated beings to implement the will of the invisible selfhood.

Gao seems so committed to this sort of duplex framework that, in the novel *One Man's Bible*, he again adopts the parallel structure with the pattern of alternate narrative as its distinct sign. Instead of two simultaneously existing identities, the same protagonist is divided into two sequential identities that are juxtaposed within the parallel structure. Two story lines concerning different life-periods of the protagonist, indicated by *he* chapters and *you* chapters, are braided into a series of

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[7] Gao, "Bali suibi," 23.

synchronic events, which keep flashing back and forth in an effective montage. If in *Soul Mountain* the protagonists of *you* and *I* are combined into an integrated personality, *he* and *you* in *One Man's Bible* contradict each other, since neither of them understands that there is a strange counterpart of himself existing in a different time. A distanced gaze at the strange self of the past happens in chapter 31, when *you*, a worldwide-wandering playwright sitting in a red velvet seat at the rear of the theatre, is watching *he*, who looks just like a weary theatrical figure and unexpectedly finds himself standing naked on a highlighted stage when fighting his way through the muddiness.[8] To *he* who flees to a small county town from the cadre school during the Cultural Revolution, from another distanced perspective in chapter 41, *you* must seem like a stranger that is far beyond the imagination of *he*, whose world is as well beyond the experience of other cultures.[9] The parallel structure presents two authentic realities about an individual's state of being, with each of them appearing extremely eccentric to the other. This authenticity of different appearances of one's temporal and situational being prevails as a key feature of Gao's writing. Just like other representative elements such as absurdity, irony, and symbolism that are evident in Gao's works, parallel structure tells of the real human condition that acts as the archetype of artistic representation.

2. Pronouns as Protagonists: An Acknowledgement of the Diversity of Human Identity

As Mabel Lee notes, utilization of pronouns as protagonists "is the most striking feature of the novel [*Soul Mountain*] and Gao Xingjian's most radical experiment in artistic expression in a novel."[10] In *Soul Mountain*, the protagonists *I*, *you* and *he* all refer to the same character who is wandering through the southern areas of China. With a specific pronoun as the protagonist in each chapter, the novel can be approximately categorised as the *I* chapters and *you* chapters. The pronoun *he*

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[8] Gao, One Man's Bible, 251.
[9] Ibid., 316.
[10] Mabel Lee, "Pronouns as Protagonists," 236.

as the protagonist does not appear until it functions occasionally as an incorporated agent of *I* and *you* from chapter 52 on. Consequently, readers are kept in ignorance of the same personality that *I* and *you* bear until the fact is exposed in Chapter 52. Before that, though, a few clues regarding the overlapping nature of the two pronominal characters can be indistinctly spotted.

To specify the reason for such an arrangement, *you*, as the alternative device for *I*, soliloquizes in Chapter 52 about the story behind the division of the protagonist's personality:

> You know that I am just talking to myself to alleviate my loneliness. You know that this loneliness of mine is incurable, that no-one can save me and that I can only talk to myself as the partner of my conversation.
>
> In this lengthy soliloquy you are the object of what I relate, a myself who listens intently to me – you are simply my shadow.
>
> As I listen to myself and you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear the loneliness and have to find a partner for your conversation.
>
> So you talk with her, just like I talk with you.
>
> She was born of you, yet is an affirmation of myself.
>
> . . . .
>
> Like me, you wander wherever you like. As the distance increases there is a converging of the two until unavoidably you and I merge and are inseparable. At this point there is a need to step back and to create space. That space is he. He is the back of you after you have turned around and left me.[11]

The union of *I* and *you* gets further verified by the involvement of *he*, who acts as one of the counterparts of the same character but looks much stranger than *you* to *I*. As the partner of *you*, *she* seems to be purposely fabricated to ease the loneliness of *you* while regenerating the experiences and imaginings of the protagonist. It is this delayed clarification concerning the links between different pronouns that evokes the parting of human personality as a basic human experience, the outcome of the diversity of inner being as the fundamental human reality. With *you*, *I* and *he* typifying diverse dimensions of the protagonist's inner life, the novel investigates one's various inner subjectivities that contribute to his different identities. The fluctuating tensions between human inner subjectivities explain the ambiguity of human identity, which perplexes the protagonist throughout the

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[11] Gao, Soul Mountain, 312-13.

journey.

I is a gloomy intellectual from Beijing who is getting tired of his career as a chartered writer. In an attempt to recover from a breakdown caused by an inaccurate lung cancer diagnosis, *I* decides to take a trip to the south. In the southern hinterland, *I* visits a number of natural reserves, historical sites and aboriginal communities, sightseeing as well as making records of the local people's activities and cultures that are inherited in the forms of historical records, ancient crafts and folk lyrics. By doing so *I* is easily immersed in a spontaneous and undisguised spirit induced by the natural beings along the protagonist's journey.

As the personified shadow of *I*, *you* seems more like a cynical wanderer who, by following the indication he learns from a stranger on the train, makes his way to Soul Mountain, a magic place full of primitive beings. At a fictional town named *Wuyi* (烏伊, no she) *you* runs across *she* and begins an affair with her. Overexcited by lust for the girl, *you* keeps telling thrilling stories in a bizarre style, which are mingled with materials from folklore, ancient jottings, fragmentary memories and odd imaginings. Through such stories, *you* seems to be spiritually lingering in a reality full of disordered consciousnesses and unstable sentiments, in contrast to the experiences *I* has.

With an insight into the realities respectively represented by *I* and *you*, the author is able to investigate the contrary beings under the same human personality: the physical being is seeking liberation from a materialistic and highly disciplined world, while the spiritual being cries for a solid living ground that can help it out of the trivia of mental illusions and moral obsessions. To flee the here and now seems to be the major concern of both beings, with a forthcoming collision looming ahead of them. The journey in *Soul Mountain* is actually such a course of fleeing, with the Soul Mountain typifying the ultimate collision, which connotes that there is nothing fundamental in one's life except birth and death.

It is based on the acknowledgement of the split of human personality that Gao develops the device of pronouns as protagonists in his works. Whether it is a literary appliance or a structural metaphor, the application of this device gains the narrator

freedom as a bystander to move back and forth among the diverse conditions under a seemingly concrete existence, which exactly meets up with Gao's proposition of "*jingguan* (靜觀, alienated perception/contemplation)" as one of the principles of Cold Literature. To articulate the foundation of applying pronouns as protagonists, the author even explores the historical formation of such linguistic references as *I*, *you* and *he*:

> At that time [remote antiquity] individual did not exist. There was not an awareness of a distinction between 'I' and 'you'. The birth of *I* derived from the fear of death, and only afterwards an entity which was not *I* came to constitute *you*. At that time people did not have an awareness of fearing oneself, knowledge of the self came from an other and was affirmed by possessing and being possessed, and by conquering and being conquered. *He*, the third person who is not directly relevant to *I* and *you*, was gradually differentiated. After this the *I* also discovered that *he* was to be found in large numbers everywhere and was a separate existence from oneself, and it was only then that the consciousness of *you* and *I* became secondary. In the individual's struggle for survival amongst others, the self was gradually forgotten and gradually churned like a grain of sand into the chaos of the boundless universe.[12]

It is a delicate meta-fictional argument that further discusses the literary concerns behind the device of applying different pronouns to protagonists. Ever since the inaccurate diagnosis of lung cancer, *I* becomes obsessed with death that is embodied in the novel by the everlasting elapse of time and space in both nature and history. While death as his greatest fear, *I* becomes spiritually possessed by *you* who, on the contrary, is not obsessed with death, but with the self. Often horrified by the inner drives from the self, *you* is seeking a final purification that is able to help him out of the fear of the self. *He* comes as a compromise between the unsolvable fears of death and the self, since both *I* and *you* realize in the end that the course of life is after all a strange other that they can not cope with. Thus the trinity *I*, *you* and *he* constitutes a cognitive structure that signals the journey in *Soul Mountain* to be an individual's pilgrimage from obsession to transcendence.

In the novel *One Man's Bible*, which was finished almost a decade after *Soul Mountain*, Gao adheres to the application of pronouns as protagonists. Different from *Soul Mountain*, in which *I*, *you* and *he* represent the various synchronic beings

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[12] Gao, Soul Mountain, 307-8.

under the same personality, the pronouns *you* and *he* in *One Man's Bible* construe the protagonist's life in a diachronic way. This "diachronic approach to self-experience,"[13] compared to the synchronic approach, paves the narrative ground whereby the author is able to trace the protagonist's different identities within different periods and social surroundings. The *he* appearing in the *he* chapters is a depressed press editor who, as the past version of the protagonist, gets involved in the group fighting during the Cultural Revolution and then exiles himself to the countryside to avoid the political persecution. The *you* from the *you* chapters represents a worldly-wandering playwright who, as the present version of the protagonist, is stumbling through a fruitless love affair with a Jewish actress because of whom he formulates the plan of working on a novel based on his personal history. Meanwhile, committed to the pursuit of "*ganzhi de zhenshi* (感知的真實, the perceptual authenticity),"[14] Gao avoids imposing any feelings and opinions of *you* onto *he* who looks too strange to be approached. It is the device of different pronouns as protagonists that helps to confirm the failure of the integration of one's heterogeneous beings as a normalcy of human existence in the labyrinth of time:

> His experiences have silted up in the creases of your memory. How can they be stripped off in layers, coherently arranged and scanned, so that a pair of detached eyes can observe what he had experienced? You are you and he is he. It is difficult for you to return to how it was in his mind in those times, he has already become so unfamiliar. Don't repaint him with your present arrogance and complacency, but ensure that you maintain a distance that will allow for sober observation and examination. You must not confuse his [your] [*sic*] fervour with his vanity and stupidity, or hide his fear and cowardice, and to do this is excruciatingly difficult. Also, you must not become debauched by his self-love and his self-mutilation, you are merely observing and listening, and are not there to relish his sensory experiences.[15]

Gao's commitment to applying pronouns to protagonists can also be spotted in his short stories. Due to the limited space inherent in this literary form, an alternate switch between different pronouns in the same text rarely appears. Rather than display the disintegrated human spirits, a constant use of pronouns as

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[13] James L. Battersby, "Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation," Narrative 14, no. 1 (2006): 27. For the debate over if the self-representation is Diachronic or Episodic, also see Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," Ratio 17 (2004): 428-52.
[14] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 16.
[15] Gao, One Man's Bible, 182.

protagonists in the short stories highlights the spiritual indifference of the protagonists toward their abused beings. *Ershiwu nian hou* (二十五年後, After Twenty-five Years) (1982), one of Gao's short stories, tells of a sad love story of *I*, whose regular identity has been tortured ever since 1957 when he was sent to the countryside as a student rightist.[16] In twenty-five years *I* was deprived of his graduation certificate and his *hukou* (戶口, registered permanent residence) in the city,[17] married a village woman and has made a living as a rural schoolteacher. The only faith that sustains *I* through those awful years is to visit his beloved girl who was trying to protect him during the Anti-Rightist Movement (反右派運動). When the ten-minute-short visit after twenty-five years of separation comes to an end, *I* disappointedly noticed that the middle-aged office lady with bobbed hair misidentified him by calling him by the wrong name. After twenty-five years the details about the protagonist's identity, including his name, had perished in the girl's mind, as compared to his remaining detailed memory of her. From the sign, *I* develops a fundamental acknowledgement of the abused and shattered human identities: empty, light, absurd yet essential, as are exactly the literary connotations the writer entrusts the personified pronouns with. Besides, instead of all other perishable traits the human identity bears, pronouns seem to provide the protagonists with more enduring and reliable identification, which typifies a persistent endeavour of human beings to identify their existence.

3. Stream-of-Language: To Catch the Transience of Human Existence

A tradition of literary representation of human conscious experiences owes much to such writers as James Joyce (1882-1941) and Marcel Proust (1871-1922), who have made such valuable contributions to the literary device of stream-of-consciousness that both the device and the writers are ranked as leading

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[16] Gao, "Ershiwu nian hou 二十五年後 (After Twenty-five Years)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 99-107.

[17] From the year of 1958, *hukou zhidu* (戶口制度, residence regulations) has been working as a countrywide administrative policy in mainland China to prevent people from free migration in the country.

symbols of modernist literature. With a shrewd insight into the transience of human consciousness, the literary device of stream-of-consciousness meets up with the sense of adventure to explore a new world beyond people's visual and imaginary experiences, which becomes a territory full of drifting and crushing debris within the innermost reaches of one's mind. Out of such an orientation comes the stream of momentary psychical flow, which is too exuberant to be ignored by a dynamic literary representation of human existence.

Gao prefers *yuyan liu* (語言流, stream-of-language) to *stream-of-consciousness* to denote the literary device since he seems concerned with a couple of integrated flaws in the stream-of-consciousness method. The first flaw lies in whether human consciousness can be fully conveyed by language. While moving forward in the form of words, Gao argues, human consciousness easily gets stuck since the language, with its descriptive, interpretive and analytical qualities, tends to disrupt an unbound conscious flow. Therefore, rather than subdue his writing to the inherent qualities of language, a writer is supposed to build a fictional context within which such elements as mood, atmosphere and psychological space are well integrated.[18] On the one hand, language has its own deep structure that cannot be overthrown; on the other, literary language bears enough flexibility to absorb as much psychical energy as the fictional context can provide. Just as a forceful mood triggers the current of one's consciousness, an energized fictional context is helpful in inducing the stream of language. To approach the realm of human consciousness within a well-established fictional context, stream-of-language is assumed to be the more appropriate agent as a literary device than the ungrounded *stream-of-consciousness*.

The other flaw regarding *stream-of-consciousness* is whether Western languages have inherited the privilege of conveying human conscious experiences. Gao suggests that literary representation of the flow of human consciousness has to conform with the nature of the language adopted by the writer. Compared to the analytical quality of Western language, the descriptive quality of Chinese invests the

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[18] Gao, "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxuexiezuo," 12-13.

language with two major merits that fulfill the needs of consciousness conveyance: verbs are not conjugated, and the language contains ingredients resulting from Buddhist contemplation:

> The Chinese language is not as restricted by subject or tense inflexions as many analytical languages of the West. There is enormous flexibility for expressing the mental activities of people, at times, so much so that shortcuts in thinking and ambiguity in meaning often occur. . . . In Chinese, reality, recollection and imagination all manifest themselves as an [*sic*] eternal present transcending grammatical concepts, thus constituting a stream of language which also transcends concepts of time. Thinking and feeling, the conscious and the subconscious, narrative and dialogue, as well as soliloquy, and even the alienation of self-consciousness, can all be subjected to examination in the method of Zen Buddhist contemplation. Instead of adopting the method of psychical and semantic analysis that can be found in Western fiction, I bring them together in the linear stream of language. [The form and structure of my novel of Soul Mountain are induced by this kind of narrative language.][19]

Even though to Gao the descriptive capability of Western languages seems inefficient in dealing with the representation of human consciousness, the distinguishing quality of "stream-of-consciousness" or "internal monologue," argues Morton P. Levitt, is basically "the free flow of its language and imagistic stream."[20] Furthermore, by virtue of the grammatical and ideological traits embedded in Chinese, the device of stream-of-language, as some sort of meta-linguistic adaptation descended from the language, is in accord with Gao's belief that language is meant to capture the transience of human existence. For Gao, fictional language is capable of regenerating not the visual images that can be achieved better through painting, but one's perception of human experiences in real life.[21] Thus, instead of seeking visual representation through language, Gao's writing seems carefully focused on the intonation of language, a delicate mood embedded in language units, which is not necessarily limited to the device of stream-of-language.

As mentioned above, stream-of-language, the verbalization of human stream-of-consciousness, is supposed to be activated by an energized fictional context, the embedded mood within texts. Throughout the journey in the novel *Soul*

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[19] Gao, "Meiyou zhuyi," 11. The English paraphrase of the excerpt is made by Kwok-kan Tam. See Tam, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and the Politics of Recognition," 11-12.

[20] Morton P. Levitt, The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction from a New Point of View, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006), 108.

[21] Gao, "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxuexiezuo," 5-14.

Mountain, on the one hand, the protagonist seems to keep fleeing whatever situations he has become involved in. What exactly makes the protagonist detached from their surroundings emerges from all directions: part of a sad memory in childhood, a sudden interruption from a cadre, an exotic air in a temple, a deep fear of the nonsense of being, and so on. On the other hand, the protagonist is moving from one fantasy to another. The tension between reality and fantasy constructs the overarching context of the novel, which asks for a special motion of language, the stream-of-language in this case, to work out one's real spiritual status within different instances. In chapter 41, *he*, the last wizard in the stockade, is one of the figures who are struggling in their declining fantasies in addition to the protagonist:

> Treading on the glutinous rice stalks, he closes his eyes and sees in front of him the pair of sixteen-year-old dragon girls. They are the prettiest girls in the stockade, their bright intelligent eyes are clear like the river waters but of course not the river in flood. Nowadays the river is very dirty when it rains, and within ten *li* on both sides of the river it's impossible to find big trees suitable for the sacrifices. For these one needs the timber of twelve pairs of different trees, all of the same height and girth. The white wood must be white spruce and the red wood must be maple. When chopped, the wood of the white spruce is silver and the wood of the maple is gold.[22]

The old wizard seems obsessed with the fantasy of a past golden age when the villagers were pleased to spend money on sacrificial ceremonies for the ancestors. As the master hosting the ceremony, *he* enjoyed holy respect from the villagers as well as the power of assigning both staff and sacrifices. As time goes by, *he* ends up with the loneliness of his declining years while the villagers show no more interests in the sacrificial ceremonies. At the moment when *he* is about to die, the old wizard, within a smooth inflectionless stream-of-language, recalls the dragon girls whose clear eyes look like river water. This reverie reminds him of how after a flood the river water becomes dirty, the outcome of the wood cutting, which reminds him again of the old days when there was always an abundance of wood from various trees for the sacrifices. By an association of such images as eyes, water and trees, the stream-of-language conveys a dying man's spiritual status, which seems still fails to compromise with the reality. Sliding between the fantasy read as youth,

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[22] Gao, Soul Mountain, 240.

beauty, colors and richness and the reality read as death, muddiness, unbelief and disaster, the stream-of-language presents a subtle perception of the last moments of a person's life.

The novel *One Man's Bible* details an individual's rebellion against the horror of revolution and death. Shifting between an ignorant Red Guard and a cynical world traveller, the point of view in the novel alternates as swiftly as in *Soul Mountain*. Owing to the use of parallel structure, the tension between different life styles lasts throughout the novel. Within the fictional context, the narration, especially in the *you* chapters, often turns into raging flows of language, which reflect the struggle taking place in the protagonist's mind:

> You're light, and float up as if you're weightless. You wander from country to country, city to city, woman to woman, but don't think of finding a place that is home. You drift along, engrossed in savoring the taste of the written language, and, like ejaculating, leave behind some traces of your life. You achieve nothing and no longer concern yourself with things in life and in afterlife. As your life was plucked back from death, why should you be concerned? You simply live in this instant, like a leaf on the brink of falling from a tree. Is it a tallow tree, a white birch, or a linden? Anyway, it's a leaf, and, sooner or later, it has to fall, but while it's fluttering in the breeze, it must strive for freedom. You are, after all, the irredeemable prodigal son of a family that was destined for destruction. You want to be free of the ties, complications, perplexities, anxieties of ancestors, wife, and memories, and to be like music, like the jazz of that black man: "They say that falling in love is wonderful, it's wonderful. . . .[23]

Within the stream-of-language, the connections between various components of the plot become so weak that the story line almost comes to a stop. It is the transient thoughts and feelings that come to dominate the breath of the text. No longer do the images and sequences behind the fictional language have to conform to the order of space, time and proper arrangement since a flow of consciousness represented by the stream-of-language splashes into an absolute inner universe with non-logical instants wedged into the course of one's existence. Drifting among the disorderly consciousnesses, the anchorless protagonist is confirming himself with the ultimate of this instant in the living process. As a betrayer of such concepts as country, family, history and memories in which he was once imprisoned when obsessed with revolution and death, the protagonist is seeking a supreme form of

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[23] Gao, One Man's Bible, 426.

freedom, which is symbolized by this instant preceding death. Reflected in written language, indulgence within this instant often turns into a boundless stream-of-language.

As early as in the 1980s, stream-of-language as a kind of representation of conscious activities was introduced into Gao's short stories. This is especially evident in *Ni yiding yao huozhe* (你一定要活著, You Must Stay Alive) (1980),[24] in which the protagonist's consciously controlled release of his repressed thoughts and feelings is displayed in a carefully moderated form of stream-of-language. This is unlike Gao's later novels in which the fictional narration sometimes seems dominated by the characters' unbounded spirits. Looking exactly like a branch off the storyline of *One Man's Bible*, the protagonist of *he* is a banished intellectual who is struggling to make contact with his wife stranded in an embattled city to encourage her to stay alive. Within surroundings where the independent mind is so suppressed that even the appearance of sinking into one's thoughts might incur public denouncement, the protagonist of *I* is getting used to hiding his soul behind an unconcerned outlook. Yet whenever he has the opportunity to free his spirit, such as in a gloomy reservoir and even on a roaring motorcycle, a sudden burst of depressed feelings brings together in a stream-of-language all the shattered spiritual visions that were once expelled by the fear of political persecution. It is in the narrow space between the reality and innermost fear that the protagonist is striving to develop as a human being, upon which such a fundamental consciousness as "you must stay alive" can draw to sustain the life of his beloved. As a representative method of conveying the unsubdued human soul, the device of stream-of-language comes to typify Gao's pursuit in realizing a dynamic processing of fictional language.[25]

4. Magical Realism: A Magical Journey beyond the Normalcy of Life

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[24] Gao, "Ni yiding yao huozhe 你一定要活著 (You Must Stay Alive)," In Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 37-63.

[25] Gao, "Ba," 339-40.

Like other improvements in artistic representation, poetic devices in literature originate to some extent from the metaphysical imitations of the archetypical modes embedded in a supreme reality that is far beyond the normalcy of life. The inherent barriers such as time, space and ideology interfere with a clear vision of reality so frequently that a systematic superstition about the normalcy of life is hard to transcend. As a reaction to such interferences, the application of magical realism in Gao's fictions breaks up the stereotyped barriers with latent connections among heterogeneous events or situations. In one interview, Gabriel García Márquez (1928-) describes the relationship between his magical texts and the reality: "disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself out of all proportion."[26] It can be anticipated that people would be astonished by the scenes of the world when barriers are lifted by a disorderly configuration of time, space and human knowledge. What magical realism is dedicated to constructing through the reconfiguration is such a supreme reality, within which the veil over human inner beings as well as the stereotypes of human existence can be removed.

In the novel *Soul Mountain*, with *I* and *you* as the synchronical protagonists, the parallel story lines interweave a number of tales highlighting other fictional figures. In terms of time and space, these fictional figures might not exist in the same dimension as the two protagonists. Rather than the pronouns taken as the names of the protagonists, these legendary figures from various tales bear more identifiable names, such as *Shilaoye* (石老爺, Grandpa Stone), *Zhuhuapo* (朱花婆, Madam Zhuhua), *Yaomei* (么妹, Miss Yao), *Wangtou* (王頭, Sir Wang) or are characterized by their professional identities such as *Linggu* (靈姑, divine lady), *Mujiang* (木匠, carpenter), *Geshi* (歌師, singing master), *Wushi* (巫師, witchcraft master), *Biqiuni* (比丘尼, nun) and *Dasima* (大司馬, chief marshal). Since the stories about these figures are adapted from local tales, historical records, ancient jottings and pure fabrication, they seem to be deliberately inserted from time to time, so that a solid time-and-space sequence is easily reversed or transposed. The

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[26] Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, and Gabriel García Márquez, The Fragrance of Guava, trans. Ann Wright, (London: Verso, 1983), 60.

constant interruptions caused by a mixture of irrelevant events against the plain fictional narration releases a series of magical mysteries, which are adopted to portray a supreme reality in the novel.

The legendary stories about *Shilaoye* (石老爺) and *Zhuhuapo* (朱花婆) have been disseminated for generations in local areas. The events within the stories seem too bizarre to be an actual reflection of ordinary life. The protagonists of *I* and *you*, however, are lured by the temptations and eventually flee from the sudden presence of super powers, which represent the mysterious forces within human consciousness that are both seductive and fatal. When *I* is planning to approach the mysterious mountain to escape his tedious daily life, the remaining might of *Shilaoye* (石老爺) appears as a warning as well as a lure of power. While *you* indulges in the affair with *she*, he remains puzzled by the tale of *Zhuhuapo* (朱花婆) who is dedicated to attracting males in order to take revenge. In both cases, the figures that are supposed to be dead persons in the past keep lingering in the current time and cast shadows of danger as well as allurement on people's minds. Yet ironically, people maintain their ambition for power and risk their lives and spiritual harmony instead of escaping it. Hence the two legendary images can be seen as a reflection of human inner being, which turns to be a mixture of the rational and irrational. A mixture of realistic characters and legendary figures distances the original self and the real self by presenting normal people's desire for super powers from supernatural beings. Thus a keen examination of human behaviour is achieved through the juxtaposition of characters that are connected in terms of their mutual conflicts.

Secondly, a disorderly mixture of time and spaces that differs from the normal life experience keeps intervening in what the protagonists perceive during their journeys, strengthening the feeling that life is shifting and variable. When *I* arrives at the village and witnesses *Wushi* (巫師, witchcraft master) reminiscing about the glorious old days, the master is supposed to have passed away two years earlier. When *I* enters a ghost town, one of the houses turns out to be the place where *I* used to spend his childhood with his family. All of a sudden, the distance across time and space disappears so that people living in different dimensions can meet

each other, whereas a strong feeling of alienation among people and objects still exists. On the one hand, no matter how hard the attempt to shorten the distance, he cannot avoid being a bystander, an indisputable fact that forecasts the instability of human life. On the other, although time and space keep constantly switching, as a form of retribution, the impact of the past always casts its shadow onto human destiny. The fantasizing effect brought by the mixture of heterogeneous time and space, a device by which the writer might reconfigure the order of the world, displays the ultimate reality of human existence.

Therefore through various literary devices the philosophy held by the implied author toward living reality as well as literary creation can sometimes be discerned. For Gao, the implied author who unusually likes to present himself within his works, the magical effect created by an audacious manipulation of ordinary realistic elements conveys his acknowledgement of the ongoing alienation of human existence. One of the major story lines in *One Man's Bible* is the protagonist's introspection concerning himself not only in the present, but also in the past. In addition to the use of parallel structure and pronouns as protagonists, an alienated observation of the protagonist in the past is realized by the device of magical realism, through which the two protagonists as the two identities of the same person are able to occasionally appear in the same surroundings facing each other. With the normal distance across time and space removed, an astonishing gap between the protagonist's different selves comes to vivify the process of alienation that functions throughout the individual's personal history. This vision of the author about human existence in an eternal state of alienation comes from an understanding of the unreliability of time, space and human consciousness. In this sense, no wonder in chapter 37 the protagonist of *you* is confused by the difference between a recollection and a dream, since with the collapse of realistic characteristics, both of them seem exactly alike. Alienation, among inner subjectivities or across one's chronological history, seems to be the only reliable force in human life. Among other literary devices, magical realism creates the kind of atmosphere within which a sharper vision of the truth of alienation can be abstracted from the superficial reality

of life.

The storytelling in Gao's short stories, compared with that in his novels, performs a normal regulation of narrative elements such as character, time and space. The only exception that suggests Gao's breakthrough of narrative poetics is the story *Shunjian* (瞬間, Instant) (1991), which presents a series of instantaneous incidents and feelings lacking clear connections.[27] Containing impressions from childhood, experiences from wanderings abroad and scenes of affairs between men and women, the storyline bounces back and forth among reminiscences, dreams and unbounded associations. The only sustaining threads that run through the story are a man lying in an armchair at the seaside and the dark seawater pouring into a basement, which separately typify the realistic world and a mysterious fantasy stemming from the reality. Miscellaneous images and consciousnesses are dazzlingly intermingled throughout the text, which even contains blank lines among passages to highlight the sharp breaks in the context. With a mixture of disparate figures and free transformation of time and space, the story seems to deliberately incorporate numerous instantaneous issues within a single moment that is indicated by a man who just adjusts a single gesture throughout the story. The magical-realistic manipulation of narrative elements focuses on the quality of instantaneity regarding human life that can be infinitely abundant in terms of its metaphysical dimension. The discovery of the prosperous instant as a supreme trait of human existence echoes the implied author's manifesto about his writing status at the end of *One Man's Bible*: "Using this instant of time as the starting point, for you, writing is a spiritual journey, . . . This bout of writing is not your goal in life, but you continue to write so that you will be able to experience more fully this instant of time."[28]

5. Fantasy Narrative: An Estranged Interpretation of the Unknown Reality

Among the various modes of literary representation, to fantasize about the

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[27] Gao, "Shunjian 瞬間 (Instant)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 311-38.
[28] Gao, One Man's Bible, 444.

realistic aspects of human experience carries literary reflection beyond the spectrum of the known. During the process of fantasizing, the earthly figures, events and feelings within daily life are re-invented in the fantasy, which is taken as a vehicle to estrange the literary perception of human existence from normal experiences. As for the relationship between literary fantasy and reality, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) explains it as a kind of game that takes place in a separated space of literary text.[29] Yet Rosemary Jackson observes that the literary probes of ideological subversions brought by fantastic narrative uncover "the unsaid and the unseen . . . which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'."[30]

In a typical fantasizing process in chapter 13 of *Soul Mountain*, *Zhuhuapo* (朱花婆) turns into a black shrike with a red beak and white toes after she dies. Since specific birds were usually described as the spiritual incarnation of the dead in ancient myths such as *Jingwei tianhai* (精衛填海, Jingwei bird filling the sea), the image of the shrike seems inspired by the old myths and in the novel reminds people of the resentful spirit of the dead *Zhuhuapo*. The fantasizing process does not have to be limited to the personalization or objectification that is normally applied to a solid figure or object. As shown in the novel, human consciousness, feelings and experiences can all be transformed into fantasies so that a full version of the fantastic in human life is able to be approached in the text. While avoiding any direct dealing with human experience, the appliance of fantasy alienates the characters from their real experiences by reshaping the qualities of the reality. The purpose of this artistic manipulation during the writing process, indicates Gao, is to re-recognize human life as well as the self by distancing and even denying the previous life experience.[31]

The fantastic images appearing in the dream of *you* in chapter 23 function as a series of subtle interpretations of the protagonist's sexual consciousness, so as to avoid a weak normal recording of the self-consciousness, which becomes a

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[29] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," trans. I. F. Grant, in Art and Literature, Vol. 14 of The Penguin Freud Library, ed. Albert Dickson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 132.
[30] Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, (London: Methuen, 1981), 4.
[31] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo 論文學寫作 (On Literary Creation)," in Meiyou zhuyi 沒有主義 (No Isms), (HK: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地圖書有限公司, 2000), 74.

stereotype in literary representation of sexuality. The single-colour images within the dream, such as the black sea, the black waterfall and the black human-like sea beasts, are consistent with the protagonist's deep and desperate indulgence in his affairs. And the qualities of the silk-like currents, the soft white fish and the fine sand grains help fabricate the peaceful mood that permeates through the self-consciousness. What dream and human consciousness have in common in this case is the instability of those images and feelings that keep sweeping one's mind. Yet the unconscious status of the dreaming process helps reveal the fantastic status of sexual consciousness in a fantastic style by which a cautious record of the stream of consciousness might fail.

It remains unclear whether the protagonist of *you* arrives at Soul Mountain in the end as he always expected. The image of Soul Mountain represented in the novel seems much more like a metaphor working to attract tortured human spirits, which is not available in a realistic world and has to be approached within the realm of metaphysics. As a kind of fantasy developed from the spiritual extremity, which the protagonist has experienced when listening to the fluctuating music, a series of images and scenes about the Soul Mountain come to vivify the protagonist's spiritual sublimation taking place after a long pilgrimage. Reflected by the fantasy within which *you* goes through death and rebirth and witnesses the magnificent image of the existent mountain, the protagonist's ultimate commitment to the human spirituality confirms a retreat from the turbulence within a realistic world.

Aside from human consciousness, feelings and experiences, historical incidents are also fantasized in bizarre versions as alternative pathways into the past. In the monologue in which *I* queries the essence of history in chapter 71, history is interpreted as a collection of miscellaneous trivia, with the chaotic elements of history being extracted from the officially determined history. An insight into the infinite possibilities of human life stimulates Gao's application of fantasies to his writing so that a turbulent and restless atmosphere can be perceived. When *you* is telling the story about an abandoned manor site in chapter 25, three alternative versions of the story are provided to fabricate the mysteries behind the dubious

historical truth. Through fantasies full of mysterious and tragic elements, the absurdity of human existence as well as the confusion about human history is presented as the core metaphysical perception of the writer.

Different from magical realism, which mainly focuses on the re-configuration of realistic elements, fantasy as a representative device of literature is basically dedicated to presenting a new reality, which might act as either a mimesis or a reaction to the reality. By virtue of artistic association, the surrealistic quality of the fantastic provides literary works with an alienated perspective on the experiential reality. When the surrealistic and realistic elements are intertwined purposefully in a literary work, as might happen in human society under extreme conditions,[32] the characters are easily stranded within embarrassing situations. In chapter 20 of *One Man's Bible*, the protagonist, *you*, is forced to climb onto an unshakable rock to look into the distance for miracles, hysterically crying out slogans then becoming speechless. And in chapter 58, a crowd of people swarm onto the street going after the supposedly good days ahead, without expectation of the forthcoming slaughter. Scared by the dubious good days, the protagonist, *he,* chooses to slip away. In both of these cases, the images and scenes without specific social backgrounds constitute the fantasies that are fabricated to mimic a reality full of ideological suppression. However, the protagonists are still people who are physically and mentally living in realistic surroundings. The extreme incompatibility between individual pursuits and fantastic social surroundings anticipates the predicaments of humans within not only the ideological labyrinth but also the fantasized human life itself.

As a literary device that is developed to transcend the normal reality, fantasy can also work as a reaction to the realistic elements, sheltering human spirits that are exhausted in the real world. Gao's short story *Huadou* (花豆, Flower Buds) (1982) is about an old man's reminiscence about the life story of Huadou, his intimate

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[32] In his speeches, Acheng 阿城 tends to describe the ideological obsession within Mao Zedong's political ideals as the surrealistic. See Acheng 阿城, Xianhua xianshuo, zhongguo shisu yu zhongguo xiaoshuo 閒話閑說，中國世俗与中國小說 (Talking Leisurely in Leisure Words) (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi 時報文化出版企業有限公司, 1995), 176-77.

friend since childhood who has kept arousing his feelings of disconsolate love.[33] While the sad story comes near its end, the protagonist, *I,* is immersed in reminiscing about the compound where they had grown up. Instead of a realistic portrayal of memories from the past, a fantastic style is adopted as an alienated conveyance of the impressions about life from the point of view of two children. From the depiction of the residents as well as their living styles, it can be concluded that the period goes back to the turbulent era before the communist regime was established. People's adherence to superstitious opinions then is different from the enthusiasm for rapid social changes within the forthcoming decades, and triggers the fantastic atmosphere, which is miserable, mysterious and horrible. Nevertheless, the gloomy experiences seem to be animated by a series of grotesque scenes in the form of fantasies when the protagonist looks back through those fanatical years full of political clichés. Although the protagonist appears to be oppressed by his memories about his childhood, it is the extremely absurd reality during the ideologically overwhelming decades that is under the examination of the literary fantasies.

6. Merging of Genres: Narrative Flexibility of Fictional Writing

Liu Zaifu calls Gao "the inventor of a new genre of fiction (小說新文體的發明家)." In Liu's opinion, this new genre is evident mainly through the writer's application of pronouns as the protagonists, which sheds a critical influence on the structure as well as the representative methods of Gao's works.[34] In addition to the frequent shift of points of view, Gao's writings are of a dauntingly manipulative diversity of narrative types and styles, which is beyond the restriction of solid subject matter. Manipulating various genres, styles and other literary elements in fictional narration, Gao's creation becomes dazzlingly sophisticated so as to artistically realize the "freedom of expression" that the implied author within his

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[33] Gao, "Huadou 花豆 (Flower Buds)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 137-82.

[34] Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian xiaoshuo xinwenti de chuangzao (高行健小說新文體的創造, Gao's Creation of A New Genre of Fiction)," in Gao Xingjian Lun (高行健論, On Gao Xingjian), (Taipei: Linking Books 聯經出版社, 2004), 147-56.

novels keeps arguing for.

In chapter 72 of *Soul Mountain,* the writer makes up a dialogue between the critic and author, which conveys how the author is accused of bold disobedience against the prescriptive regulations of working out a novel as a genre, as well as his unbounded manipulation of miscellaneous nonsense in his work. The chapter itself, which slips away from the storyline of the novel, is a typical example of how the writer breaks from the normal pattern of the genre, which urges a literal consistency in terms of its subject and form. From a particular perspective, the chapter articulates the implied author's ideas about how fictional narration can be evolved. From such uncommon anticipation of fictional narrative, it can be perceived that the writer is dedicated to obeying his authentic writing state rather than being concerned with a smooth reception of the readership. Then, the styles of Gao's fictional narration seem to vary as sharply and often as the representative motivations switch. A passage in Gao's literary criticism articulates the mixed styles of fictional narration within the novel:

> The traditional Western philosophy is used to abstracting forms, to which particular meanings are assigned for dialectical practices. I'd rather go with an alternative path, considering that mind is restricted by form, to seek new forms in the process of abandoning those fixed forms. The concept of pre-modern Chinese fiction was quite broad, in that from ethnographically geographical treatises to records of humans and ghosts, myths and fables, legends and historical romance, serial novels, jottings, miscellanea are all fictions. While breaking the present fictional format, naturally, I return to this tradition, incorporating all sorts of genres into this novel of mine. If modern fiction is mainly pursuing the purity of narrative style, I, on the contrary, am trying to continuously transform narrative style, as is associated with the shift of personal pronouns.
>
> 西方傳統哲學往往把形式抽象出來，從而也賦予某種意義，加以辯證。我不如另找一條路，神為形圍，從擺脫固有的形式的過程中去獲得新的形式。中國古小說的觀念原本十分寬闊，從風物地理志，到志人志怪，神話寓言，傳奇史話，章回，筆記，雜錄，皆小說也。我在破除現今小說格式的時候，自然而然，返回到這個傳統，將各種文體都包容到我這部小說裏。如果說現代小說主要在追求敍述方式的單純，我則試圖不斷演變敍述方式，並且同人稱的轉換結合起來。[35]

As the writer disputes in the passage, during different historical periods, types

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[35] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue," 177-78. Translations from the Chinese, here and elsewhere, are my own.

of writing like *fangzhi* (方誌, local chronicles), *zhiren* (誌人, records of humans), *zhiguai* (誌怪, records of ghosts), *chuanqi* (傳奇, romance), *huaben* (話本, prompt-books), *zhanghui* (章回, episodic novel), *biji* (筆記, jottings) and *zalu* (雜錄, miscellaneous records) present different forms of fiction.[36] As a matter of fact, not all of the types mentioned above are literary writings, e.g. *fangzhi* (方誌) was the recordings of local history; and *biji* (筆記) had been a kind of casual record made by literati of their daily reading and writing. However, these literary types seem to provide the writer with the sources of stories as well as the literary traits of different narrative texts. What the writer takes as a revolutionary act is to absorb various narrative elements and tastes into his fictional writing.

To achieve the narrative flexibility that conforms to his writing state as well as aesthetic ambition, Gao develops a fictional text that accommodates workable ingredients from various literary genres, the manipulation of which brings a mosaic style to his writing. Meanwhile, Gao breaks the singularity of narrative sequence in fictional writing with continuous interruptions of shifting subjects and narrative styles. For example, the story of *Biqiuni* (比丘尼, nun) saving *Dasima* (大司馬, chief marshal) in chapter 48 in the novel *Soul Mountain* is one interpreted directly from a jotting made in the *Jin* (晉) Dynasty. Although the issue of self-salvation imbedded within the story is one of the novel's major concerns, there is no sequential connection between this chapter and the context. Both the subject matter and the narrative language within the chapter form a careful nonconformity against the narrative sequence of the novel. This textual interruption happens at a time when the protagonist is in need of a catalyst that will help him to contemplate human behaviour while his affair with *she* is turning into a disaster according to the context. It is through the interruption of heterogeneous narrative elements that a delicate variance within human consciousness is exposed.

A malleable application of various types of narrative into the fiction as a literary genre breaks down the barriers among different genres and enriches the

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[36] Gao, Soul Mountain, 453.

representation of fictional narration. Specifically, in terms of fictional language, Gao is trying to remove the boundaries between fiction and prose within his writing.[37] From the perspective of language, subject matter and narrative style, allegedly *Soul Mountain* absorbs the traits from a variety of literary genres so as to accurately represent the intricacy of human existence in the modern era. The new ideas Gao brings to his fictional creation meets with his Cold Literature's requirement of literary alienation, which urges the writer to observe and represent the world with peripheral perspectives that are mainly embodied in drifting narrative manipulations. When in the 1980s a rigid realistic representation of literature was still dominating mainstream literature in mainland China, it was a progressive act for Gao to work on a novel that is dedicated to overturning authoritative literary principles.

In the novel *One Man's Bible*, quite a few chapters are full of monologues made by either the protagonists or the implied author.[38] These chapters adopt prosified scripts conveying personal views about life as well as the art of writing, which hold fairly loose connections with the storylines. With different types of writing and sudden interruptions to the plot, these monologues bring to the fictional narration intermittent stagnation, which usually happens when the conflicts within the novel approach their climax. The protagonists, who were stumbling in various predicaments, are now alienated from their situations and start observing themselves from detached perspectives. Although they make the switching of point of views within the novel even more complicated, the commentary asides made by alienated voices do complement the intricacy as well as delicacy of human inner being that are supposed to be inspected through Cold Literature. With the eyes of an alienated self gazing at his image stuck in insurmountable realities, all the embarrassments and harshness he is facing in his life are more fiercely displayed.

Although tactical interruptions brought by frequent transformations in the narrative styles and point of views are rarely applied in his early short stories, Gao seems truly fascinated by manipulating different representative techniques to improve the manifestations of his writings. The whole text of the story *Gongyuan li*

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[37] Gao, "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxuexiezuo," 24.
[38] See Gao, One Man's Bible, chapter 17, 24, 26, 37, 39, 54, 56, 57, 59, and 61.

(公園裏, In the Park) (1983) is fabricated with the conversation between two characters, and even the extremely limited descriptive words are focused on an irrelevant figure that remains in the background.[39] Without any clues about the characters' appearance, activities or mental state, a reader still can figure out such a hard issue as the collapse of the love and dream of a whole generation through the two persons' talk.

[39] Gao, "Gongyuan li 公園裏 (In the Park)," in Gao Xingjian duanpian xiaoshuo ji 高行健短篇小說集 (An Anthology of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社, 2001), 255-69.

Conclusion

When Beethoven dictated his last fugue to his student Anna, Anna asked him what key he was going to use. "No key," Beethoven answered. He was thinking about building a bridge connecting his time to the future. The deaf man asked Anna to look for the sound of notes in the silence within her, as he unexpectedly found himself overwhelmed by the grandeur of melodies in a silent world.[1] When it comes to Gao Xingjian's case, Gao seems to look for the voice of shuttle by advocating a Cold Literature practice, which seeks the authenticity of literary representation through alienated perception and contemplation exerted on the Self and its surroundings. The notion of "No Isms" sets the tone of Gao's literary works, manifesting the writer's commitment to a purely individual undertaking of literary creation instead of adherence to consolidated presuppositions and assumptions.

Gao's literary expression and practice are essentially the outcome of a reaction to the lack of creative freedom during the longstanding political restrictions on originality in mainland China. Meanwhile, it has to be admitted that a persistent meditation on the everlasting conflicts of human existence as well as literary inquiries beyond their political aspects have largely contributed to Gao's prominent aesthetic pursuits in writing. A typical voice questioning Gao's qualifications to be a Nobel laureate of literature is that in Gao's *Soul Mountain* a mixture of Western-oriented cultural visions, metaphorical embodiment of individual souls, writing manner congenial to European readership and the exotic atmosphere come together to "very well fit a European literary prize committee's perceptions of a contemporary work of art with Chinese characteristics."[2] Nevertheless, it is hard to understand why these qualities of the novel, *Soul Mountain*, even though a couple of them might be controversial, would undermine the value of Gao's writing. In a reverse situation, the same qualities would have been ascribed to Shakespeare's writing to explain why it has had such a great reception in the East.

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[1] This description of the deeds about Beethoven is based on the fictional yet refreshing movie: Copying Beethoven, dir. Agnieszka Holland, 1 hr. 44 min., MGM/US, 2006, videocassette.

[2] Kam Louie, "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South," The China Journal, no. 45 (2001): 149.

The real merit of Gao's work resides in the permeating literary consciousness, which urges the writer to pursue an endless exploration of the reality of literature as well as the world. This literary pursuit, like all great explorations that have attempted to expand human knowledge, sets out to answer such ultimate questions as "Why?" "What?" and "How?" The concept of "Cold Literature" can be seen as the intellectual outcome of a long period of thought and practice undertaken by the writer in order to clarify these perplexing questions. As the canon of Gao's literary practice, it connotes a writer's ontological perceptions of the reality of literary creation, literary representation, and fictional narrative.

1. *Taowang* (逃亡, fleeing): the Ontology of Literary Creation

Gao is known to readers as a writer in exile from his native country since 1987. He had been working on his masterpiece, *Soul Mountain,* before he left China, and in 1989 finally finished it while residing in France. Exile has marked Gao's status as a writer throughout his writing career. Yet, instead of accepting the label "exiled writer," he announced literary creation to be an act of fleeing: "Writing is a kind of fleeing. . . . Only when in fleeing, I am feeling I am alive, and can get the full freedom of speaking without fear. Therefore to flee is the purpose of our writing."[3] In his novel, *Soul Mountain,* Gao even traces the tradition of fleeing by referring to the great classical poets, Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BC) and Li Bo (李白, 701-762) who obtained their fantastic literary achievements when in exile.

For Cold Literature, the decentring of creative writing serves as an aesthetic stance rather than a literary reaction. It keeps writers consciously distancing themselves from the embarrassing realities of real being which does not have to be limited to political prohibition only. This distance sparks the awareness that literature does not have to cater to authorities and orthodoxies prescribed by various ideological groups, doctrines and traditions. Only through distance from repressive circumstances does literature achieve the freedom to represent the real traits of the

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[3] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo," 60.

relationship between being and the world.

It is difficult to specify the ontological mechanics of literary creation due to the paradox of all the metaphysical practices exerted on such questions: what sensation does a writer hope to experience by literary creation? What aspect of literary creation causes poets to devote their intelligence and passions to it? Is it for amusement or consolation? For Cold Literature, it is the distance that defines the ultimate situation of literary creation. Put in the background of a ferociously intolerant society with little freedom of thought and expression, literature is doomed to perish when its creator lacks distance between the real and the false. Under such a condition, fleeing would become the only choice for those who still cherish the need to create in freedom.

At this point, fleeing can be seen as an act against the atrocities that characterize totalitarianism and fanaticism of all forms, as well as a metaphor for an individual who attempts to maintain his independence from ideological restrictions. To reflect this, in *Soul Mountain*, Gao positions the protagonist in exile in the society of the *Yangtze* River from the society of the Yellow River. The geographic distance between the origins of the two cultures reflects Gao's scepticism toward historical clichés, and his reaction against the monopolistic national myth. In the sense of metaphor, Gao keeps shifting "from the impoverished realities into literary imaginations,"[4] so that his artistic creativity will not be stifled by the repressive political pressure as well as the absurd realities of human beings. As Kwok-kan Tam says concerning Gao's idea of literary creation, "Only by fleeing from culture, politics, history, society and even the limitations of one's self, can a person be totally free to examine his true, natural selves in a detached and transcendental manner."[5]

The only question is that, if fleeing itself becomes a hollow stance, it will deteriorate to an idealistic superstition Gao himself would reject. Fortunately Gao seems cautious of this trap by coordinating his current thoughts firmly with classical traditions of Chinese philosophy. As Gao acknowledges, the cultural spirit he is trying to embrace in his novel, *Soul Mountain,* originates from a combination of

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[4] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo," 74.
[5] Tam, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and the Politics of Recognition," 13-14.

Chinese Buddhism, folk culture and the philosophies of *Lao Zhuang* (老庄, Taoism), *xuanxue* (玄學, Chinese metaphics) and *chanxue* (禪學, Zen), which together influenced the tradition of Chinese classical literature with the spirit of *yinyi* (隱逸, to live in seclusion).[6]

2. *Jingguan* (靜觀, Distanced Gaze): the Ontology of Literary Representation

People need stories because, according to J. Hillis Miller, "the reader of a novel detaches himself or herself from the immediately surrounding world of real-life obligations."[7] The narrator in Gao's fictional narrative, fulfilling the demands of *jingguan* (靜觀, distanced gaze), owns the same desire of detaching himself or herself from the immediately surrounding world within the fictional narrative. When the narrator happens to be a character in these stories, like the protagonist of *I* in Gao's novels, the "dramatized narrator,"[8] or "hypodiegetic narrator" in Gerard Genette's term,[9] is actually engaged in an alienation from his own stories. This alienating position taken by the dramatized narrator is supposed to help the protagonist gain a perspective from the outside of his existence while he still remains within, as well as to introduce "the empirical other," suggests Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), that is "in the foreground of his own experience in order to be able to sublimate that experience."[10]

Since fleeing helps the writer to gain a proper distance between literary creation and the world, to observe the world from a detached perspective becomes an aesthetic strategy Gao deploys to represent a subtle reality of human existence. In Gao's opinion, it is wise for a writer to stay on the verge of life so that he can

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[6] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue," 179-80.
[7] J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," 68.
[8] Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 151-53.
[9] David Macey, The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 158.
[10] Theodor Adorno, "On the Relation Between Art and Society, an Excerpt from Aesthetic Theory," in Critical Theory Since 1965, ed. Hazard Adams, and Leroy Searle, (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 234.

investigate it with beneficial sobriety.[11] At this point, *lengyan jingguan* (冷眼靜觀, distanced gaze with cold eyes) features Gao's literary representation with refreshing concerns and styles.

Gao's belief in a kind of detached representation is based on his scepticism toward the knowledge of external realities. Gao's fundamental concern in his literary practice rests on the representation of human identity that embodies the instability of all kinds of forms and beings. Human identity is extremely unreliable because it is easily moulded by the restless human inner being as well as by various social ideologies. By conveying the embarrassments characters face when struggling with their constantly changing identities, Gao develops a sense of the absurd throughout his storytelling, which seems to reinforce the theme of absurdity invoked by Franz Kafka (1883-1924) in the tradition of Modernist fiction.[12] Just like the image of the castle in Kafka's novel *The Castle*, the image of Soul Mountain in the novel *Soul Mountain* is an unreal place that the protagonist never actually approaches.

Gao is known for his adoption of Zen practice to improve his perception about the relation between literary text and the world. As a philosophical notion derived from the classical Zen practice, *jingguan* (靜觀, distanced gaze) as an aesthetic pursuit in Gao's literary representation also works as a reaction to the fanaticism that characterizes Chinese literature in a modern era. Instead of being prompted by a sort of ideologically-oriented enthusiasm, readers of Gao's fictions, as well as the audience of his plays, are supposed to be kept at a proper distance of reception so that they could transcend the superficial aspects of the represented and obtain a clarification about the fact of human existence on a personal basis. At this point, Gao develops a fairly unusual narrative style that foregrounds a series of poetic devices to ensure that distance.

Besides its specific effect on literary concerns and styles, the method of alienated perception/contemplation also characterizes such narrative elements as

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[11] Gao, "Lun wenxue xiezuo," 68.

[12] Liu Zaifu, "Cong Kafuka dao Gao Xingjian, Gao Xingjian xingguan meixue de lunshu tigang 從卡夫卡到高行健——高行健醒觀美學的論述提綱 (From Kafka to Gao Xingjian, An Outline of the Discussion on Gao Xingjian's Aesthetics of Self-Contemplation)," Mingbao yuekan 明報月刊 (Mingbao Monthly), no. 9 (2005): 90.

narrator and point of view. In both *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*, on the one hand, the dramatized narrators are often arranged as bystanders to observe the characterized beings within the selfhood. On the other, a frequent shift among different points of view typified by the pronouns of "you," "I" and "he," serve to highlight the detached self-contemplation applied to the individual consciousness. With a keen vision of the latent fragmentary nature of the self, Gao involves alienated perception/contemplation as a cognitive pattern to reach the transparency of representation, as Gao himself admits in the literary criticism below:

> In the Chinese language, the subject of a sentence is often omitted. Verbs do not need to inflect according to the change of subjects. All these characteristics give flexibility to the shift of narrative points of view. When the self [,] which assumes the subject of a sentence [,] is absent in expression, the self becomes a transcendental self, and ultimately a no-self. When the self is shifted to *you*, and then to *he*, the *you-me* is an objectification of *me*, and the *he-me* can be considered as a detached *me* who observes *me*. This is a process which I call "self-detached self-contemplation" (*choushen jingguan*, 抽身靜觀), or ["] observation-contemplation ["] (*guanxiang*, 觀想). In this process, the self reaches a state of unlimited freedom in self-detachment. [I found this freedom when I wrote Soul Mountain.][13]

3. No Isms: the Ontology of Fictional Narrative

The Structuralist approach to narrative, for example Vladimir Propp's groundbreaking research on Russian folktales, presupposes that storytelling has inherited a general formula, or "code" in Jakobson's linguistic term, on which people depend to investigate fundamental questions about their existence within an imaginary world. The tradition of this basically formalist description about literary narrative can be traced back to Aristotle's hierarchical sequencing of narrative elements especially in tragedy in *Poetics*, and was further advanced by the Chicago School, with its most recent representative critic Wayne C. Booth, to a humanism-oriented perspective applied in novel studies.

The classical formula of narrative includes functional narrative elements,

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[13] Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue," 174-75. The English paraphrase of the excerpt is made by Kwok-kan Tam. See Tam, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and the Politics of Recognition," 12.

from the major ones of "plot," "characters," "setting," "diction," "point of view," "meaning" to the sub-elements of plot structure such like "interdiction," "interrogation," "departure," "return,"[14] as well as a dynamic construction of these elements. Based on such an enclosed text-focused vision on narrative, Wayne C. Booth produces an open structure of narrative, which sees the narrative as a communication process taking place between the society and the text through a series of agencies such as "real author/reader," "implied author/reader," and "narrator/narratee."

If the formula of fictional narrative, a notion beyond intellectual and historical conditions, is solid and, moreover, leads to an exposition of the structure deeply embedded under the surface of human existence, all the storytelling for generations can be seen as the variances of the narrative discourse, with all kinds of narrative genres and styles — mythology, legend, romance, realism, modernism — as deviations to consolidate the formula that is supposed to interrelate human nature and the text.

Whether the formula of narrative is breakable is beyond the discussion in this thesis. Nevertheless, through the history of literary creation, an obvious fact is that great works and great writers continue to import something new to enrich and reinforce the narrative discourse from all aspects. For example, James Joyce (1882-1941) started a new version of fictional narrative by telling the story of the character's consciousness in the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). This literary focus on the representation of human consciousness has had a considerable impact on the morphology of narrative in the 20th century.

As a reaction to the gradually stereotyped formula and discourse of literary narrative, especially within its Chinese background, Gao Xingjian's notion of Cold Literature carries three dimensions of implications regarding fictional narrative. First of all, ideologically, it dismisses various sorts of isms, especially "Socialist Realism," that confine individual creativity for the sake of collective wills. Secondly, it introduces deviations to some fundamentally structural elements of fictional

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[14] J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in Critical Terms for Literary Studies, ed. Frank Lentricchia, and Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 71.

narrative, which can be outlined as the weakening of plot, the combination of characters and points-of-view through frequent shift of personal pronouns, and the situational representation of settings under various mental conditions of characters. Thirdly, rhetorically, it relies on the modulation of language to accomplish an alienated perception about the fragments of selfhood.

(1) Cognitive Approach

Structurally and cognitively, Gao's notion of Cold Literature indicates a switch of textual construction from the Aristotelian model about plot, characterization and overall structure, to an exclusively concentrated mimesis of the inner being.

When contemplating the cultural functions of narratives, Miller concludes that "narratives reinforce the dominant culture and put it in question, both at the same time."[15] In other words, fictional narrative is able to "create" the ways of behaving people can follow, as well as to "demystify" the given ideas from the real world. According to this formula, Gao's practice of Cold Literature has created in an imaginary world a spontaneous selfhood that corresponds to the philosophy of *xingling* (性靈, natural sensuousness) while putting it in question in a context of mixed internal subjectivities and external reigning assumptions of a real world. This irresolvable paradox also characterizes the narrative of Cold Literature with an alienated or transcendental mood, within which the implied authors and the narrators alike in Gao's novels can more freely investigate the "many selves" of the selfhood.

In his cognitive approach to the narrative, David Herman brings forward the idea of "process types" of narratives, such as processes of doing, processes of sensing, and processes of being, to stipulate the generic distinctions among narrative genres.[16] At this point, Gao's novels and some stories may be attributed to psychological fiction since the processes of sensing and being in those works

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[15] Ibid., 70.
[16] David Herman, Story Logic, Problems and Possibilities of Narrative, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 136-48.

obviously outweigh the processes of doing. Thus the declination of plot and actions as well as the emphasis on representation of inner being as the purposeful strategies of Gao's fictional writing seem to receive a well-defined explanation on a cognitive basis.

(2) Ideological Approach

Ideologically, through the Brechtian alienation-effect, it builds a group of binary opposites, such as female/male, nature/society, religion/secularity, nether world/this world, etc., and re-evaluates the broader cultural codes underlying the textual binaries.

The ideological import of Gao's fictions not merely speculates on the dichotomy of cultural assumptions about gender, history, culture, religion, time, and human psyche, but also draws an accurate picture of the world within which an individual mutates. In this sense, Gao's fictional text can be seen as "the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological subtext."[17] With the subtext representing "the fantastic offspring of the political unconscious," Gao's text provides the "signs of the reality which this [political] unconscious is trying to repress."[18]

Gao's fundamental concern about human identity lasts throughout his literary inspection of the complex of ideological discourses. The major discovery about human identity in Gao's fictions is in its tremendous instabilities. The instabilities of human identity derive from the fierce dynamic of human inner subjectivities as well as from the restless intervention of outer ideologies. Whereas Gao's fictional writing holds an indomitable stance against all the grand narratives of the ideological unconscious within those binary opposites, it can be discerned from the endings of his novels that the tension between human identity and social ideologies is irresolvable. Such an outcome of Gao's literary practice does not imply the failure of

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[17] Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious, (London: Routledge, 1996), 81.
[18] Robert Scholes, Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 81.

Cold Literature, but, on the contrary, specifies the exact case for Cold Literature as well as the reason why literary pursuit is endless.

(3) Rhetorical Approach

Rhetorically, Gao's fictional narrative adopts a series of figures of rhetoric, such as pronouns as protagonists, stream-of-language, fantasies, merging of genres, etc., to defamiliarize/estrange the conventional literary norms as well as a seemingly intimate world by disrupting the acts of perception and recognition.

For Cold Literature, the nature of literary expressions lies in the realization of representations of reality, consciousness and identity through the transformation of language. Language, as a universal consensus admitted by Gérard Genette, is "the raw material specific to this art [of literature]."[19] When further contemplating the theme raised by Roman Jokobson of "what makes certain texts works of art," Genette recruits the notion of "poetic language" to articulate that "language is no longer treated as a transparent means of communication but as a perceptible, autonomous, and noninterchangeable raw material."[20] Gao's enthusiastic commitment to the exploration of the poetic potentials of language, as reflected in both his literary mind and creative practice, can be seen as a conscious fulfillment of such a fundamental concern about verbal arts. The mimetic qualities of poetic devices that Gao innovated and amended based on the archetypes of human existence faithfully echo Aristotle's dictum of, as interpreted by Genette, "there can be no creation by way of language unless language becomes a vehicle of mimesis of representation."[21]

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[19] Gérard Genette, Fiction & Diction, trans. Catherine Porter, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1.
[20] Ibid., 13.
[21] Ibid., 6-7.

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Glossary

Ba	跋	guishen	鬼神
Ba Shu	巴蜀	*Haishang*	海上
baoying	報應	Han	漢
bi'an	彼岸	Han Shaogong	韓少功
biji	筆記	*He nabian*	河那邊
Biqiuni	比丘尼	*Hei'an zhuan*	黑暗傳
Chaguan	茶館	Hemudu	河姆渡
Chezhan	車站	hezuoshe	合作社
chan	禪	*Hongloumeng*	紅樓夢
Changjiang	長江	huaben	話本
chanju	禪劇	*Huadou*	花豆
chanxue	禪學	*Huahuan*	花環
Chezhan	車站	Huanghe	黃河
choushen jingguan	抽身靜觀	hukou	戶口
Chu	楚	hundun	混沌
Chuan	川	jia	假
chuanqi	傳奇	Jia Pingwa	賈平凹
Chunlan	春蘭	Jiangnan	江南
chusheng	出身	jie	劫
chushi	出世	Jin	晉
Daodejing	道德經	jingfan	經幡
daofa ziran	道法自然	Jingwei tianhai	精衛填海
Dasima	大司馬	jiujiu bashiyi nan	九九八十一難
Dong	侗	jiujiuguiyi	九九歸一
dunwu	頓悟	*Juedui xinhao*	絕對信號
E	鄂	junzi guo	君子國
Ershiwu nian hou	二十五年後	kuhai	苦海
fan youpai yundong	反右派運動	Lao Zhuang	老庄
Fang Shuji	方書記	Laoliu	老劉
fangzhi	方誌	Laozi	老子
ganzhi de zhenshi	感知的真實	*Leiyu*	雷雨
Gao Xingjian	高行健	leng	冷
gehui	歌會	lengde wenxue	冷的文學
Gei wo laoye mai yugan	給我老爺買魚竿	lengyan jingguan	冷眼靜觀
geming wenxue	革命文學	Li Bo	李白
Geshi	歌師	Liangzhu	良渚
Gong Xian	龔賢	Lin	林
gongnongbing	工農兵	Linggu	靈姑
Gongyuan li	公園裏	*Lisao*	離騷
guanxiang	觀想	Liu Zaifu	劉再复

Lu Shuji	陸書記
Lu Xun	魯迅
lunhui	輪迴
Lushang	路上
Ma Ying-jeou	馬英九
Meiyou zhuyi	沒有主義
Miao	苗
minghe	冥河
Mo Yan	莫言
Mujiang	木匠
Muqin	母親
neibu zhuti jianxing	内部主體間性
Ni yiding yao huozhe	你一定要活著
niugui sheshen	牛鬼蛇神
niupeng	牛棚
Nuoxi	儺戲
Pengyou	朋友
Qian	黔
Qiang	羌
qimu	杞木
qingchu jingshen wuran yundong	清除精神污染運動
Qu Yuan	屈原
quanru zhuyi	犬儒主義
renlun	人倫
rushi	入世
shanghen wenxue	傷痕文學
shanshui hua	山水畫
Shen Congwen	沈從文
Shennongjia	神農架
shenti xiezuo	身體寫作
Shilaoye	石老爺
shiyan xiju	實驗戲劇
Shunjian	瞬間
sijiu	四舊
Su	蘇
taiji	太極
taiyang	太陽
taiyin	太陰
taowang jingying	逃亡精英
Tujia	土家
wanghe	忘河
Wangtou	王頭
Wanhuibao	晚彙報
Wenxue de liyou	文學的理由
wenxue geming	文學革命
Wo zhuzhang yizhong lengde wenxue	我主張一種冷的文學
Wolongshan	臥龍山
Wu	巫
wubulong	五步龍
wuqi ganxiao	五七幹校
Wuru	侮辱
Wushi	巫師
wushu	巫術
wuwo	無我
Wuyi	烏伊
wuyu	無慾
Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan	現代小說技巧初探
xiandai zhuyi	現代主義
xianfeng xiju	先鋒戲劇
Xiang	湘
xiangtu wenxue	鄉土文學
Xiaohui	小慧
Xiaoshuo de weilai	小說的未來
Xiaoxiao	蕭蕭
Xiejiang he tade nü'er	鞋匠和他的女兒
xingguan	醒觀
xingling	性靈
Xiyouji	西遊記
Xu Wei	徐渭
Xu Ying	許英
xuanxue	玄學
xuetong	血統
xungen wenxue	尋根文學
Yaomei	么妹
yangjian	陽間
Yang Yi	楊義
yeren	野人
Yi	彝
Yigeren de shengjing	一個人的聖經
yinguo	因果
yinjian	陰間
yinyi	隱逸
Yu, xue ji qita	雨、雪及其他

Yuan'en si	圓恩寺	zhiqing	知青
Yun	雲	zhiren	誌人
yuyan liu	語言流	*Zhongguo qingnian*	中國青年
zalu	雜錄	*Zhongshi wanbao*	中時晚報
Zaoqingshi	早請示	zhongyuan	中原
Zhang Ailing	張愛玲	Zhuangzi	莊子
zhanghui	章回	Zhuhuapo	朱花婆
zhaohun	招魂	ziwei	自爲
Zhe	浙	zizai	自在
zhen	真	zizai zhi wu	自在之物
zhiguai	誌怪	zuoxie	作協

Appendix A

Abstracts of Gao Xingjian's Two Novels

Soul Mountain (1989)

The novel contains 81 chapters, which can be roughly divided to *I* chapters and *you* chapters according to different pronouns as protagonists in those chapters. The pronouns of *I* and *you* are alternately applied to indicate the different identities of the same protagonist. After being inaccurately diagnosed with lung cancer, the protagonist of *I* embarks on a wandering trip to the south China, with a concern for how his vitality can be revived. The journey lasting thousands of miles turns to be a pilgrimage leading the protagonist out of various fantasies about life. When the journey comes to its end, *I* experiences an imaginary death on the top of an ice-caped mountain, Soul Mountain. The novel presents a kaleidoscopic picture of civilian society existing along the upper and middle reaches of the *Yangtze* River in south-western China. With its mysterious atmosphere permeating the whole journey, Soul Mountain as a divine place typifies a solid spiritual destiny that represents people's yearning for salvation and the immortality of their souls.

One Man's Bible (1998)

The novel contains 61 chapters, which can be roughly divided to *you* chapters and *he* chapters according to different pronouns as protagonists in those chapters. The pronouns of *you* and *he* are alternately applied to indicate the same protagonist in different life periods. The protagonist in the novel is a writer who has developed a cynical attitude to life after surviving the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, the protagonist of *he* becomes involved in the outrageous group fighting and later escapes from Beijing to the countryside in order to survive the political struggle. Staying in a foreign culture, the protagonist of *you* roams all over the world enjoying instantaneous delights and trying to bid farewell to his personal history which prevents him from being a vigorous creature. The novel's title *One Man's Bible* tells of an individual's firm belief in this moment among infinite instants of human life.

Appendix B

An Abstracted Chronology of Gao Xingjian[1]

1940
Born on 4 January in Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province, China. His father was a bank officer and his mother was an actress before she married. It was she who cultivated Gao's interest in the theatre and writing.

1957
Graduated from high school. He was admitted to the Department of French at Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages.

1962
Graduated from Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages, majoring in French. Assigned to work as a translator at the Foreign Languages Press until 1980.

1966-67
Cultural Revolution began and he burned all his manuscripts to avoid possible persecution. He was later sent to a special cadre school for re-education.

1970
Spent five years (1970-75) labouring in the countryside. During his leisure time he secretly continued his creative writing.

1975
Returned to Beijing and resumed his work as a translator at Foreign Languages Press.

1977
Assigned to work as a translator at the Foreign Affairs Unit of the Writers' Association of China.

1978
Started to experiment with the novel form.

1979
Novella: "Hanye de xingchen" 寒夜的星辰 [Stars on a cold night] was published in *Huacheng* 花城 (Guangzhou), No. 3, 1979.

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[1] This is an abstracted form of *A Chronology of Gao Xingjian* made by Terry Siu-han Yip, and it is mainly based on Gao's activities related to his fictional creation and criticism. For the original version, see Terry Siu-han Yip, "A Chronology of Gao Xingjian," in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, ed. Kwok-Kan Tam, (HK: Chinese University Press, 2001), 311-39.

1980

Short story: "Pengyou" 朋友 [Friend] was completed in Beijing in March, and later published in *Mangyuan* 莽原 (Zhengzhou), No. 2, 1981.

Essay: "Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan" 現代小說技巧初探 [A preliminary exploration of the techniques of modern fiction] was published in *Suibi* 隨筆 (Guangzhou), No. 1, 1980. This was the first installment of the serialized version of his study on the theory of modern fiction.

Travelled to France as translator for a delegation of Chinese writers led by Ba Jin.

Assigned to work as a writer with the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

1981

First collection of essays on literary techniques: *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* 現代小說技巧初探 [A preliminary exploration of the techniques of modern fiction] was published in book form by Huacheng chubanshe 花城出版社 in Guangzhou in 1981. It led to a violent polemic on "modernism."

Novella: "You zhi gezi jiao hongchun'er" 有隻鴿子叫紅唇兒 [A pigeon called red beak] was published in *Shouhuo* 收穫 (Beijing), No. 1, 1981.

Short story: "Pengyou" 朋友 [Friend] was published in *Mangyuan* 莽原 (Zhengzhou), No. 2, 1981.

Transferred to the Playscript Division of the Beijing People's Art Theatre and became a full-time playwright.

1982

Short story: "Yu, xue ji qita" 雨、雪及其他 [Rain, snow and others] was completed in February and published in *Chou xiaoya* 醜小鴨 (Beijing), No. 7, 1982.

Short story: "Lushang" 路上 [On the road] was published in *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學 (Beijing), No. 9, 1982.

Short story: "Ershiwu nian hou" 二十五年後 [After twenty-five years] was completed in June and published in *Wenhui yuekan* 文匯月刊 (Shanghai), No. 11. 1982.

Short story: "Huadou" 花豆 [Flower buds] was completed in July.

Essay: "Tan xiaoshuoguan yu xiaoshuo jiqiao" 談小說觀與小說技巧 [On fiction and techniques in fiction writing] was published in *Zhongshan* 鍾山 (Nanjing), No. 6, 1982.

Started to write the novel *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul mountain] in the summer. The novel was later completed in Paris in 1989.

1983

The play *Chezhan* 車站 [The bus-stop] was banned and Gao was severely criticized during the "spiritual pollution" campaign. But Gao was recognized by Mainland drama critics as one who started the experimental theatre on the Mainland.

Learned that the government intended to send him for political reform. To avoid harassment he undertook a five-month tour from July to November of the forest and mountain regions of Sichuan Province, tracing the course of the Yangtze River from its source to the coast, covering a distance of close to 15,000 kilometres.

Short story: "Haishang" 海上 [At sea] was completed in March, and published in *Chou xiaoya* 醜小鴨 (Beijing), No. 9, 1983.

Short story: "Huahuan" 花環 [Garland] was published in *Wenhui yuekan* 文匯月刊 (Shanghai), No. 5, 1983.

Short story: "Yuan'en si" 圓恩寺 [Yuan'en temple] was published in *Haiyan* 海燕 (Dalian), No. 8, 1983.

Short story: "Muqin" 母親 [Mother] was published in *Shiyue* 十月 (Beijing), No. 4, 1983.

Short story: "He nabian" 河那邊 [On the other side of the river] was published in *Zhongshan* 鍾山 (Nanjing), No. 6, 1983.

Short story: "Xiejiang he ta de nü'er" 鞋匠和他的女兒 [The shoemaker and his daughter] was published in *Qingnian zuojia* 青年作家 (Chengdu), No. 3, 1983.

Essay: "Tan xiandai xiaoshuo yu duzhe de guanxi" 談現代小説与讀者的關係 [On modern fiction and its relation with the reader] was published in *Qingnian zuojia* 青年作家 (Chengdu), No. 3, 1983.

He was wrongly diagnosed as suffering from lung cancer.

1984

Translation: Ng Mau-sang 吳茂生 translated into English Gao's "Xiandai jiqiao yu minzhu [sic] jingshen" 現代技巧與民族精神 (a chapter from *A Preliminary Exploration of the Techniques of Modern Fiction*): "Contemporary Techniques and National Characters in Fiction" in *Renditions*, Nos. 19 & 20 (1983). Actual date of publication in 1984.

1985

Collection of novellas: "You zhi gezi jiao hongchun'er" 有隻鴿子叫紅唇兒 [A pigeon called red beak] was published by Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe 北京十月文藝出版社.

Short story: "Wuru" 侮辱 [Insult] was published in *Qingnian zuojia* 青年作家 (Chengdu), No. 7, 1985.

Short story: "Gongyuan li" 公園裏 [In the park] was published in *Nanfang wenxue* 南方文學 (Guangzhou), No. 4, 1985.

Short story: "Chehuo" 車禍 [A car accident] was published in *Fujian wenxue* 福建文學 (Fuzhou), No. 5, 1985.

Short story: "Wuti" 無題 [Untitled] was published in *Xiaoshuo zhoubao* 小說周報 (Tianjin), No. 1, 1985.

1986

Short story: "Gei wo laoye mai yugan" 給我老爺買魚竿 [Buy my grandfather a fishing rod] was published in *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學 (Beijing), No. 9, 1986.

Translation: Paul Poncet translated into French his short story "Gongyuan li" 公園裏 [In the park], which appeared in *Le Monde* on May 19, 1986.

1987

Visited Hong Kong to present a paper at the conference "Modernism and Contemporary Chinese Literature" jointly organized by the Department of English at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and University of Hong Kong in 1987. His paper "Chidao de xiandaizhuyi yu dangjin Zhongguo wenxue" [Belated modernism and Chinese literature today] was later published in *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 (Beijing), No. 3, 1988.

Invited by Morat Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft to visit Germany but he could not get a visa because he was not a member of the Artists' Association of China and thus not considered a professional artist. With the help of Wang Meng 王蒙, the Minister of Culture then, he eventually succeeded in getting the visa from the government. From Germany Gao later went to France.

Translation: Paul Poncet's French translation of the short story "Muqin" 母親 [Mother] was published in the journal of contemporary fiction *Brèves*, No. 23, 1987.

1988

Gao sought and obtained residence in Paris. He worked as a professional painter and writer.

Essay: "Chidao de xiandaizhuyi yu dangjin Zhongguo wenxue" 遲到的現代主義與當今中國文學 [Belated modernism and Chinese literature today] was published in *Wenxue*

pinglun 文學評論 (Beijing), No. 3, 1988.

Translation: Göran Malmqvist's translation of *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* 給我老爺買魚竿 [Buy my grandfather a fishing rod] in Swedish was published by Forum in Sweden in 1988.

1989

Revoked membership of the Chinese Communist Party in reaction against the government's suppression of the people in the June 4 (Tiananmen Square) Incident in Beijing.

Declared *persona non grata* by the Beijing government and all his works were banned in China.

Novel: *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain], which he started in Beijing in 1982, was completed in Paris.

Collection of short stories: *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* 給我老爺買魚竿 [Buy my grandfather a fishing rod] was published by Lianhe wenxue chubanshe 聯合文學出版社 in Taipei in 1989.

Translation: Almut Richter translated *Chehuo* 車禍 [A car accident] into German and published it in the magazine *Die Antenne*.

1990

Novel: *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain] was published in Taipei by Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 聯經出版事業公司 in 1990.

Essay: "Wo zhuzhang yizhong leng de wenxue" 我主張一種冷的文學 [I advocate a cold literature] was published in "Shidai wenxue 時代文學," a supplement of *Zhongshi wanbao* 中時晚報 (Taipei), August 12, 1990.

Essay: "Taowang yu wenxue" 逃亡與文學 [Exile and literature] was published in "Shidai wenxue 時代文學," a supplement of *Zhongshi wanbao* 中時晚報 (Taipei), October 21, 1990.

1991

Gao was criticized by the Chinese government and dismissed from the Chinese Communist Party in 1991. The government closed down his residence in Beijing.

Short story: "Shunjian" 瞬間 [An instant] was published in "Shidai wenxue 時代文學," a supplement of *Zhongshi wanbao* 中時晚報 (Taipei), No. 74, September 1, 1991. it was later included in *Chao lai de shihou* 潮來的時候 [Tide rise] published by Taiwan wenhua shenghuo xinzhi chubanshe 臺灣文化生活新知出版社, 1992.

Attended a seminar on *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain] at Stockholm University in which he read a paper on "Wenxue yu xuanxue: Guanyu *Lingshan*" 文學与玄學：關於《靈山》 [Literature and metaphysics: On *Soul Mountain*] in 1991.

Essay: "Bali suibi" 巴黎隨筆 [Jottings from Paris] appeared in *Guangchang* 廣場 (Princeton), No. 4 (February), 1991.

Translation: "Shunjian" 瞬間 [An instant] was translated into Japanese and published by JICC Press in 1991 in a collection of short stories.

1992

Awarded *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de la France* by the French government.

Essay : "Zhongguo liuwang wenxue de kunjing" 中國流亡文學的困境 [The predicament of Chinese exile literature] was published in *Mingbao yuekan* 明報月刊 [Ming Pao monthly] (Hong Kong), October, 1992. It was based on a paper Gao presented at London University in 1992.

Essay: "Wenxue yu xuanxue: Guanyu *Lingshan*" 文學与玄學：關於《靈山》[Literature and metaphysics: On *Soul Mountain*] appeared in *Jintian* 今天 (Stockholm), No. 3, 1992. It was based on a paper Gao presented at Stockholm University in 1991.

Essay: "Haiwai Zhongguo wenxue mianlin de kunjing" 海外中國文學面臨的困境 [The predicament of Chinese literature overseas] was a paper presented at Lund University in Sweden in 1992.

Essay: "Hanyu de weiji" 漢語的危機 [The crisis of the Chinese language] was presented at a conference on contemporary Chinese literature held at University of Heidelberg in Germany in 1992.

Translation: Göran Malmqvist's Swedish translation of *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain], entitled *Andarnas berg*, was published by Forum in 1992.

1993

Essay: "Meiyou zhuyi" 沒有主義 [Without isms] was written in November and presented at a conference on "Chinese Literature over the Past Forty Years" held in Taiwan in 1993.

Essay: "Geren de shengyin" 個人的聲音 [The voice of the individual] was presented in a conference on "Nation, Society and the Individual" at Stockholm University in 1993.

Essay: "Guojia shenhua yu geren diankuang" 國家神話与個人癲狂 [Myth of the nation and insanity of the individual] was published in *Mingbao yuekan* 明報月刊 [Ming Pao monthly] (Hong Kong), August, 1993.

Translation: Excerpts of the novel *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain] was translated into French by Noël Dutrait and published in *Saprighage* in July, 1993.

Translation: Mieke Bourges translated into Flemish short stories "Haishang" 海上 [At sea], "Gei wo laoye mai yugan" 給我老爺買魚竿 [Buy my grandfather a fishing rod] and "Ershiwu nian hou" 二十五年後 [After twenty-five years] and published them in a Belgian journal Kreatief, No. 3/4, 1993.

1995

Essay: "Meiyou zhuyi" 沒有主義 [Without isms] was published in Chinese in *Wenyibao banyuekan* 文藝報半月刊, No. 1, 1995.

Translation: Lena Aspfors and Torbjörn Lodén translated into English Gao's essay "Geren de shengyin" 個人的聲音 [The voice of the individual] which appeared in *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, No. 6, 1995.

Translation: Winnie Lau, Deborah Sauviat and Martin Williams translated Gao's essay "Meiyou zhuyi" 沒有主義 [Without isms] into English in *Journal of Oriental Society of Australia* (Sydney), Nos. 27-28, 1995-96.

Translation: Noel and Liliane Dutrait's French translation of *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain], entitled *La Montagne de l'âme*, was published in 1995 and it was well received in France.

1996

Collection of essays on literature and art: *Meiyou zhuyi* 沒有主義 [Without isms] was published in Hong Kong by Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地圖書有限公司 in 1996. Twenty-two essays are included in the collection.

Translation: Winnie Lau, Deborah Sauviat and Martin Williams translated Gao's essay "Meiyou zhuyi" 沒有主義 [Without isms] into English in *Journal of Oriental Society of Australia* (Sydney), Nos. 27-28, 1995-96.

1997

Awarded *Prix du Nouvel An chinois* for the novel *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain].

Essay: "Weishenme xiezuo" 爲什麼寫作 [Why do I write] appeared in Wanzhi's edited book *Goutong: Miandui shijie de Zhongguo wenxue* 溝通：面對世界的中國文學 [Communication: Chinese literature before the world] which was published in Stockholm by Olof Palme International Center in 1997.

Publication of recorded conversations: The recorded conversations on literature between Gao Xingjian and Denis Bourgeois were published in book form. The title is *Au plus près*

du réel: Dialogues sur l'écriture (1994-1997), with Denis Bourgois as co-author. It was published in Paris by Éditions de l'Aube, 1997.

Translation: Noel Dutrait translated into French *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* 給我老爺買魚竿 [Buy my grandfather a fishing rod] and entitled it *Une canne à péche pour mon grand-père*. The French edition was published by Éditions de l'Aube in 1997.

1998

Second novel: *Yige ren de shengjing* 一個人的聖經 [One man's bible], which Gao started writing in Paris in 1996, was completed. It was subsequently published in Chinese in Teipei in 1999 and in Hong Kong in 2000.

Essay: "Xiandai hanyu yu wenxue xiezuo" 現代漢語与文學寫作 [Modern Chinese language and literary writing] was published in *Xianggang xiju xuekan* 香港戲劇學刊 (Hong Kong) in October, 1998.

Collection of essays: *L'Encre et la lumière* was published in Paris by Editions voix Richard Meir in 1998.

1999

Novel: *Yige ren de shengjing* 一個人的聖經 [One man's bible] was published in Taipei by Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 聯經出版事業公司 in 1999.

Translation: *Yige ren de shengjing* 一個人的聖經 [One man's bible] appeared in French under the title *Le livre d'un home seul* and published by Éditions de l'Aube in 1999.

2000

Novel: *Yige ren de shengjing* 一個人的聖經 [One man's bible] was published in Hong Kong by Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi 天地圖書有限公司 in 2000.

Collection of essays: *Une Autre esthéque* was published in Paris by Editions Cercle d'art in 2000.

Translation: Mabel Lee translated *Lingshan* 靈山 [Soul Mountain] into English and it was published by HarperCollins in Sydney in June, 2000.

The Swedish Academy announced the award of Nobel Prize for Literature to Gao Xingjian on 12 October, 2000.

Delivered his Nobel Lecture "Wenxue de liyou" 文學的理由 [The case for literature] in Chinese on 7 December, 2000.